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Strategie di apprendimento, didattica metacognitiva nella Classe ad Abilità Differenziate

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Abstract

Metacognitive strategy instruction plays a crucial role in fostering self-regulated learning in primary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. However, little is known about how teachers integrate these strategies into their teaching and whether their own metacognitive awareness influences instructional choices. This study aims to examine the extent to which primary school EFL teachers apply metacognitive strategy instruction and whether their personal awareness impacts their use of explicit, implicit, teacher-centred, or socially mediated approaches.

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted with pre- and in-service primary school EFL teachers, collecting self-reported data on metacognitive awareness and strategy use. The analysis revealed that while teachers incorporate metacognitive strategies in their teaching approaches, implicit instruction was the dominant approach, whereas explicit instruction was mainly used for goal setting and reflection tasks. A key finding was the weak correlation ($r = 0.0318$) between teachers' metacognitive awareness and their instructional choices, suggesting that awareness alone does not predict implementation and metacognitive instructional approaches. Additionally, socially mediated strategies were underutilized, despite their potential benefits for collaborative peer learning especially in the perspective of the mixed-ability class.

These findings highlight the need for teacher training programs that bridge the gap between metacognitive awareness and practical classroom application. Future research should explore how institutional and pedagogical factors shape metacognitive instruction, ensuring that teachers are equipped to foster self-regulated learning in diverse EFL classrooms.

Keywords: metacognitive strategy instruction, implicit and explicit teaching, primary EFL education, teacher's metacognitive awareness, self-regulated learning, mixed-ability class.

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INTRODUCTION

In un mondo sempre più interconnesso, la capacità di apprendere e comunicare in più lingue è diventata una competenza cruciale. L'apprendimento delle lingue è un processo complesso che non si basa solo sull'istruzione, ma anche sulle strategie che gli studenti utilizzano per acquisire, memorizzare e applicare le conoscenze in modo efficace. Le strategie di apprendimento linguistico sono riconosciute come strumenti essenziali in questo processo. Come evidenziato da Oxford, le strategie di apprendimento linguistico hanno un impatto significativo sull'apprendimento degli studenti, specialmente in relazione alla competenza linguistica (Oxford, 2003:12–14). Inoltre, l'uso consapevole di strategie adeguate aiuta gli studenti a diventare "apprendenti indipendenti, autonomi e 'lifelong learners.'" (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991, in Oxford, 2003:9). Nonostante la loro importanza, la ricerca sulle strategie di apprendimento linguistico e sulla didattica strategica in classi eterogenee rimane indefinita/inconclusa (Plonsky, 2019), evidenziando la necessità di ulteriori ricerche sulla loro applicazione nei contesti educativi reali.

Uno di questi contesti è la classe ad abilità miste (CAD) caratterizzata da variazioni significative nella competenza linguistica degli studenti, negli stili di apprendimento, nei background e contesti culturali, nelle capacità cognitive e nei livelli di motivazione. Questa tesi adotta la prospettiva di Caon (2008, 2016) sulla CAD. Secondo Caon (2008: XII), la CAD non è solo una realtà, ma un modo di osservare le dinamiche della classe per cogliere la diversità come strumento di apprendimento collettivo. Come afferma Caon (2016: 51, corsivo in originale), la CAD è "*non tanto come la realtà delle classi ma piuttosto come un modo di osservare la realtà delle classi*". Caon (2016:9) sottolinea che la CAD è "un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della 'differenza', che si può registrare in più aspetti e su più livelli, è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico di tutti gli studenti". Attraverso questa visione, la CAD promuove metodologie didattiche inclusive, flessibili e collaborative, che valorizzano le caratteristiche e i contributi di ogni discente.

Le strategie di apprendimento linguistico e la didattica delle strategie metacognitive offrono soluzioni efficaci, poiché valorizzano e migliorano l'autonomia, il coinvolgimento e i risultati degli studenti. (Chamot, 2004: 19; de Boer et al,2018; Dignath et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2019; Wang et al.,1990, Oxford, 2003:13).

Nel contesto della CAD, così come definite da Caon (2008, 2016), queste strategie risultano particolarmente cruciali per promuovere la crescita individuale e collettiva. Le strategie metacognitive si allineano a questa prospettiva, permettendo agli studenti di riconoscere i propri punti di forza e contributi unici, facilitando sia l'apprendimento personale che la collaborazione all'interno del sistema. L'insegnamento delle strategie svolge un ruolo centrale nel favorire il coinvolgimento e l'autonomia. I modelli attuali di insegnamento delle strategie di apprendimento linguistico enfatizzano lo sviluppo della consapevolezza degli studenti riguardo ai propri processi di pensiero e strategie, incoraggiandoli ad adottare metodi che migliorino l'apprendimento e la competenza linguistica (Chamot, 2004: 21).

Questa tesi esplora come gli insegnanti in formazione e in servizio utilizzano le strategie di apprendimento linguistico e, in particolare, le strategie metacognitive (pianificazione, monitoraggio e valutazione), sia nel loro apprendimento linguistico personale sia nell'applicazione dei metodi didattici per l'insegnamento della lingua inglese. L'obiettivo è indagare se gli insegnanti siano consapevoli di queste strategie e se questa consapevolezza influisca sulla loro gestione e sulle scelte didattiche nelle dinamiche della classe ad abilità miste.

Struttura della tesi

-Il Capitolo 1 esplora il concetto di classi ad abilità miste nei contesti educativi di Italia, Regno Unito e Stati Uniti. Evidenzia la loro importanza come quadro per capire le contesti di apprendimento diversificati, introducendo l'Universal Design for Learning (UDL) come approccio per valorizzare l'inclusione. Il capitolo stabilisce una base teorica e pratica per un'educazione adattiva, accessibile e inclusiva.

- Il Capitolo 2 esplora le differenze individuali e le teorie sulle strategie di apprendimento linguistico nei contesti educativi eterogenei. In particolare, esamina il ruolo delle differenze individuali—tra cui tratti della personalità, stili cognitivi, motivazione, attitudine e tipologie di intelligenza—nel modellare e influenzare il coinvolgimento degli studenti nell'uso delle strategie di apprendimento linguistico durante il loro percorso di apprendimento.

- Il Capitolo 3 approfondisce la didattica metacognitiva e il suo ruolo nello sviluppo dell'apprendimento strategico, con un'attenzione particolare ai bambini. Questo capitolo esplora l'importanza dell'insegnamento delle strategie metacognitive nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere ai bambini. In passato, le teorie iniziali collocavano lo sviluppo di queste strategie in età avanzata. Tuttavia, ricerche più recenti dimostrano che anche i bambini più piccoli possono sviluppare una consapevolezza metacognitiva. Ciò avviene quando sono supportati da un'istruzione metacognitiva esplicita e/o implicita con supporto (scaffolding) in ambienti di apprendimento collaborativi.

Viene inoltre analizzato il ruolo della consapevolezza metacognitiva degli insegnanti nella didattica efficace e come può influenzare le loro metodologie didattiche. Integrando insegnamento esplicito, collaborazione tra pari, modellizzazione da parte dell'insegnante e scaffolding adattivo, gli educatori possono creare ambienti inclusivi in cui gli studenti diventino apprendenti strategici e autonomi.

-Il Capitolo 4 presenta la metodologia dello studio e i dati sui partecipanti. Il capitolo descrive il metodo di ricerca impiegato per analizzare l'uso e l'applicazione delle strategie di apprendimento linguistico con particolare attenzione alle strategie metacognitive—pianificazione, monitoraggio e valutazione—tra gli insegnanti di scuola primaria in formazione e in servizio. L'indagine esplora la correlazione tra l'uso personale delle strategie metacognitive da parte degli insegnanti e la loro metodologia didattica applicata, con un focus specifico sul ruolo di queste strategie nelle classi ad abilità differenziate.

Lo studio si basa su un'indagine tramite questionario, che ha permesso di raccogliere dati quantitativi per analizzare in modo strutturato le strategie metacognitive utilizzate e riportate dagli insegnanti, i loro metodi e le scelte pedagogiche nell'applicazione della didattica metacognitiva in classe.

1 UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AND MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES: FRAMEWORKS FOR INCLUSIVE AND ADAPTIVE EDUCATION

1.1 Introduction

In today's educational landscape, the diversity of learners in classrooms presents both challenges and opportunities for educators. Modern classrooms are microcosms of global diversity, characterized by variations in students' linguistic backgrounds, cognitive abilities, cultural contexts, learning styles, and levels of motivation. Nowhere is this diversity more evident than in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), where students with a broad spectrum of competencies and experiences converge.

Traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching methods often fall short in addressing the varied needs of such heterogeneous groups. These methods risk marginalizing students by failing to provide the flexibility necessary for equitable learning experiences (Minello, 2006). This reality calls for a paradigm shift, emphasizing inclusive and adaptive pedagogical approaches (in Caon,2016: 11) As Caon (2016: 10) observes, inclusivity begins with viewing diversity not as a limitation but as a resource for collective growth. This shift demands a systemic lens, one that recognizes the classroom as an interconnected environment where each learner's contribution enhances the collective learning experience. This reality necessitates a paradigm shift in how teaching and learning are approached—one that prioritizes accessibility, adaptability, and inclusivity at its core (Caon, 2016:10)

This chapter adopts Caon's (2008, 2016) perspective, which reframes the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) as a dynamic system rather than a static collection of diverse individuals. According to Caon (2008: XII), the MAC is not merely a reflection of classroom heterogeneity but represents a way of "observing classroom reality" that transforms diversity into an asset for inclusive education. As Caon (2008: XII) explains, "La CAD […] è da intendersi non tanto come la realtà delle classi ma piuttosto come un modo di osservare la realtà delle classi". This definition emphasizes the importance of leveraging diversity as a cornerstone for effective teaching strategies and classroom innovation.

At the heart of Caon's framework is the idea of open systems. Caon (2016: 9) defines the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) as "La CAD, così, si presenta come un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della 'differenza', che si può registrare in più aspetti e su più livelli, è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico di tutti gli studenti". Each student's unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives enrich the classroom ecosystem, transforming it into a collaborative and inclusive environment. From this perspective, effective teaching involves not only meeting individual needs but also fostering interdependence and collective growth among learners.

Caon's systemic approach to the MAC aligns closely with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasizes the need to design learning environments that proactively accommodate diversity. UDL's principles include providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression. (Meyer et al.,2014). These principles

resonate with Caon's emphasis on adaptive and inclusive teaching strategies. By integrating UDL principles, educators can address the varied needs of students while creating classrooms that celebrate diversity as a strength.

1.2 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a robust framework for addressing these challenges. Meyer et al. (2014) describe UDL as an 'educational approach' that encompasses aspects related to the functioning of biological education processes, curriculum design, teaching methods, and educational tools. "Universal Design for Learning is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn". (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:7)

Rooted in principles of neuroscience and educational equity, UDL provides a proactive approach to curriculum design, emphasizing flexibility to accommodate all learners from the outset. As Hiver et al. (2019:1) argue, "Even the most effective instructional method or technique will not work in all situations, nor, perhaps, should it be expected to". This highlights the importance of designing curricula that are adaptable and inclusive by nature. By offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, UDL transforms traditional educational environments into dynamic spaces where diversity is not merely managed but celebrated as an asset. (Hall et al, 2012:2)

This section positions UDL as the foundational lens through which inclusive education can be understood and implemented. By exploring its historical development, guiding principles, and practical applications, the chapter establishes how UDL serves as a theoretical backdrop for addressing the MAC. In doing so, it provides a framework for understanding the strategies and methodologies that educators can employ to create inclusive, effective learning environments for all students.

1.2.1 Historical Context and Development of UDL

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework originated at the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), driven by advances in neuroscience, learning science, and digital technologies. Developed by Anne Meyer, David Rose, and their colleagues, UDL emerged as a response to barriers in traditional curricula that failed to address the diverse needs of learners. (Meyer et al, 2014)

In 1999, CAST received a federal grant to establish the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, which catalysed UDL's development and adoption (Hall et al, 2012:6). UDL was also influenced by the universal design movement in architecture, which aimed to create environments that were accessible to all users from the outset. (Edyburn, 2005:16) As in architecture, the educational concept of "universal design" focuses on proactively eliminating barriers and ensuring inclusivity (Hall et al. 2012:5). What makes UDL different is its focus on learning. The principles "address the dynamic processes of teaching and learning." (Hall et al, 2012:5). CAST advanced the concept of universal design for learning as a means of focusing research, development, and educational practice on understanding diversity and applying technology to facilitate learning. (Edyburn, 2005:16)

1.2.2 Principles of UDL

Research in neuroscience and cognitive science has informed the development of UDL, which is based on three core principles: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. (Hall et al. 2012:12)

- Recognition Networks (the "What" of Learning): Providing multiple means of representation to help students identify, understand, and process information.
- Strategic Networks (the "How" of Learning): Offering multiple means of action and expression, allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways.
- Affective Networks (the "Why" of Learning): Supporting engagement and motivation by providing multiple means of engagement tailored to student interests and needs (Hall et al, 2012:212-14). These principles were established to address the reality that "there is no such thing as a regular student", emphasizing variability as the norm rather than the exception. Traditional curricula were critiqued for catering to an "average" learner, which often excluded students with disabilities, cultural and linguistic differences, or diverse cognitive needs (Hall et al, 2012:4).

1.2.3 Impact of UDL on Curriculum Design

The 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) defined UDL as a scientifically valid framework that provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, how students respond, and how they are engaged. This flexibility is essential for reducing barriers in instruction while maintaining high expectations for all learners, including students with disabilities or limited English proficiency (Hall et al, 2012:2).

CAST's (2018) approach to UDL also reframed the problem of inequity, noting that: "The principles of UDL enable us to recognize that variance across individuals is the norm, not the exception, wherever people are gathered. Traditional curricula have the 'disability,' because they only work for certain learners. They are filled with barriers that are erected at the point of curriculum design" (Hall et al, 2012:4). The integration of flexible instructional strategies, digital tools, and multiple pathways for learning ensures a more inclusive and effective educational experience for all students.

Importantly, UDL is not merely about integrating technology. UDL is not primarily about technology: it is about pedagogy. Although UDL often leverages the power of digital media for flexibility, it is not technology dependent. The framework can be applied in low-tech or no-tech contexts, emphasizing pedagogy over tools. For instance," Excellent UDL instruction can be achieved without technology" (Hall et al, 2012:7).

UDL is not a fixed model but a dynamic framework for designing inclusive and flexible learning environments. By addressing the variability of learners and rejecting the outdated notion of an "average" student, but to be the best student they can, UDL has become a transformative force in modern education, providing a blueprint for equity and innovation in diverse classrooms (Hall et al, 2012:8). According to Rose and Meyer (2002), "UDL guides students to be the best learners they could be. The recommended process should help students to become more 'expert' learners. It should not take the form of filling students with the knowledge, but of students taking care of their learning." (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:25)

1.2.4 UDL Principles and Cognitive Networks (Affective, Recognition, Strategic Networks)

Cognitive neuroscience identifies three key neural networks involved in learning: the recognition network, which "helps the learner to recognize the patterns, collect information, and put it into meaningful categories"; the strategic network, which supports planning, pattern generation, and task performance; and the affective network, which manages motivation and engagement by determining the most important patterns for the learner (Rose & Strangman, 2007 in Galkienė ,Monkevičienėė, 2021:28). Studies confirm that "these three main networks are active during learning "(Siew, 2020; Wardle & Baker, 2020; Allegra et al., 2020; Markett et al., 2018 in Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:28).
"An educational response while prioritising the interaction of recognition, strategic, and emotional networks, and organising education within the UDL approach is determined through the three main UDL principles" - engagement, representation, and action/expression- which align with three primary cognitive networks in the brain. (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:10-14)

- Provide multiple means of engagement (the 'why' of learning)
- Provide multiple means of representation (the 'what' of learning)
- Provide multiple means of action and expression (the 'how' of learning)
  (Meyer et al., 2014 :51)

1.2.5 Affective Networks and Engagement

The 'why' of learning relates to motivation, interest, and sustained effort. Engagement is fostered when material is meaningful and relevant. (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:11) Providing choices and connecting lessons to real-world applications promotes intrinsic motivation and self-regulation. Meyer et al. (2014:15) explain, "Students' engagement in their own learning is promoted, which leads to the development of the motivation, the practice, the reflection, the self- efficacy, the self-regulation, the self-determination, the executive functioning, the comprehension, and the situational awareness". For example, in a language class, students might *choose* between presenting a topic through debate, creative projects, or collaborative discussions, fostering both motivation and reflection on their learning preferences.

1.2.6 Recognition Networks and Representation

Recognition networks focus on how learners perceive and process information, underpinning the UDL principle of representation—the 'what' of learning. (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:11). Mixed-ability classrooms often include students with diverse cognitive and perceptual needs, making it essential to present information in multiple formats. As Meyer et al. (2014) state, "To meet the diversity, a range of ways to present information are employed, using IT and other technologies that help to supplement information with text, language, animation, and image" (cited in Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:12). Hence, all learners "should be included and have access to multiple means of representation, action, and

expression." (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:44) This approach ensures that content is accessible, whether through visuals, audio, text, or hands-on experiences.

1.2.7 Strategic Networks and Action and Expression

Strategic networks involve planning, organizing, and executing tasks, which is reflected in the UDL principle of action and expression—the "how" of learning. (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:12) Traditional assessments often favour certain strengths while marginalizing others, but UDL promotes flexibility by offering diverse ways for students to demonstrate their understanding. Meyer et al. (2014) note, "The goal is not a fact that has to be memorized but the process of pursuing the goal in the most appropriate way for them" (in Galkienė,Monkevičienėė, 2021:10) For instance, a language class might allow students to present knowledge through essays, oral presentations, or visual timelines, encouraging them to reflect on their methods and adapt their approaches.

1.2.8 The Connection Between UDL and Constructivist Theory

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are deeply rooted in constructivist theory, particularly Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and his sociocultural approach to learning. UDL builds on these ideas by emphasizing the creation of flexible learning environments that support learners in constructing knowledge through interaction and scaffolding. (Galkienė,Monkevičienėė, 2021:27)

Following Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) theory of the zone of proximal development and his sociocultural theory, in addition to research in neuroscience and education, Meyer et al.(2014) "also develop the principles of learning to learn, which predetermine not only the conscious perception of knowledge and ability to apply it but also the understanding of one's own learning experience in the process, when students become expert learners" (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021: 7). After the teacher creates opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning, students' engagement in their own learning is promoted, which leads to the development of 'the motivation, the practice, the reflection, the self- efficacy, the self-regulation, the self-determination, the executive functioning, the comprehension, and the situational awareness" (Meyer et al. 2014 :15). "Learners who can assess their own learning needs set their personal learning goals, and monitor their progress are termed the expert learners" (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021: 24) In addition, as mentioned "UDL guides students to be the best learners they could be. The recommended process should help students to become more expert learners. It should not take the form of filling students with the knowledge, but of students taking care of their learning." (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021: 25)

UDL principles—providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression—are designed to accommodate diverse learners and align with the constructivist focus on active, meaningful, and social participation in learning. By addressing the recognition, strategic, and affective networks in the brain, UDL ensures that learning is flexible and personalized. (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:10).

This connection to constructivist theory is further reflected in UDL's emphasis on active engagement and collaboration in the learning process:

“The educational response to neurological differences in human cognitive activity would be providing multiple means of representation. Active engagement of learners in the analysis of information leads to a deep and rich understanding and perception of it” (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:11).
Ultimately, UDL embodies the constructivist view that learning is a dynamic, interactive process in which students construct meaning based on prior experiences and the social environment. (Galkienė,Monkevičienėė, 2021:27)

1.2.9 Reducing Barriers and Promoting Equity

UDL emphasizes reducing barriers by replacing rigid, one-size-fits-all methods with adaptable strategies. As Meyer et al. (2014) highlight, “Barriers are reduced for schoolchildren with ordinary and special educational needs, and success opportunities are created for all learners” (Galkienė,Monkevičienėė, 2021:15). According to Meyer et al. (2014), utilizing flexible educational methods and resources can “minimise educational barriers and open the door for full participation” benefiting not only students with special educational needs (SEN) but also enhancing learning opportunities for all students. (in Galkienė,Monkevičienėė 2021:10)

1.2.10 Integration with Metacognition

The synergy between UDL and metacognition is evident in reflective practices and collaborative work. “Consistent application of UDL principles and continuously encouraging reflection on teaching and learning practice together with learners allow the latter to be well aware of their learning process, to constantly improve it, and to engage in joint work of teachers and learners, as well as the evaluation of its results.” (García-Campos et al., 2020 in Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:15).

1.2.11 Conclusion

By aligning the principles of UDL with the brain's affective, recognition, and strategic networks, educators can create dynamic, inclusive classrooms that celebrate diversity. These environments not only reduce barriers and address diverse learning needs but also empower students to become reflective, self-directed learners. Rooted in neuroscience and constructivist theory, UDL, when combined with metacognitive strategies, provides a robust framework for fostering equitable and inclusive educational experiences that prepare all learners to thrive.

1.3 The Mixed-Ability Class (MAC)-Perspectives

Education today is shaped by classrooms that reflect the diversity of society, where students bring a wide range of abilities, experiences, and learning needs. The Mixed-Ability Class

(MAC) are a defining characteristic of this diversity, offering both opportunities and challenges for educators. Rather than viewing this diversity as an obstacle, recent perspectives, such as those of Caon (2008, 2016), propose a dynamic and inclusive understanding of the MAC—one that celebrates differences and sees them as resources to enrich the learning experience.
This section explores the concept of the MAC and examines how diversity, when effectively managed, can foster meaningful collaboration and innovation in the classroom. Through this lens, the MAC becomes a platform for both individual and collective growth, laying the foundation for a deeper analysis of its characteristics and implications.

1.3.1 Defining Mixed-Ability Classes and perspectives

Mixed-Ability Classes (MACs) represent a common yet complex phenomenon in educational systems globally. The Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) has been defined in numerous ways across different educational traditions and disciplines. Ur (1996) describes MACs as heterogeneous classrooms where students vary in language proficiency, motivation, cultural background, and cognitive abilities. Tomlinson (2001) expands on this, emphasizing that students in MACs require differentiated instruction to address their unique learning profiles, interests, and readiness levels. Meanwhile, Bailey and Bridges (1983) argue that MACs should not be seen as a barrier to learning but as a natural characteristic of any classroom, requiring strategic grouping and flexible methodologies. In contrast, Caon (2008, 2016) offers a more systemic perspective, viewing the MAC generally speaking, as a dynamic, open system where diversity is not merely an obstacle but a resource that fosters collective learning. These varied definitions highlight a common theme: the MACs are not simply classrooms with diverse learners, but rather environments where differentiated and inclusive pedagogies must be implemented to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. These variations and diversity inevitably influence teaching methodologies and classroom dynamics. (Ur,1996; Tomlinson,2001; Caon ,2008, 2016)
The Mixed Ability Class (MAC) can be defined as a dynamic system where the diversity among students is not merely acknowledged but actively harnessed as a resource for effective learning.
As defined by Caon (2008:XII) the MAC is “un sistema dinamico che dipende dalla natura e dall’apprendimento di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso; in questo senso essa viene presentata come un sistema aperto in cui la valorizzazione della differenza di ogni alunno, su più livelli ed aspetti, diventa fondamentale per poter gestire efficacemente le eccellenze e le diversità all’interno della classe”.
However, the MAC, according to Caon (2016) is not merely diverse classrooms. As Caon (2016) explains, they represent a lens through which diversity is viewed as a dynamic resource for collective learning, reframing the focus from managing differences to leveraging them for educational growth. “La CAD […] è da intendersi non tanto come la realtà delle classi ma piuttosto come un modo di osservare la realtà delle classi.” (Caon, 2008: XII).
As articulated by Caon (2016:9), MAC “va intesa non come una somma di persone differenti ma come un sistema dinamico caratterizzato dall’apporto di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso”. This conceptualization moves beyond viewing the classroom as a collection of disparate individuals to seeing it as an interconnected environment where each participant contributes uniquely to the overall system. In such settings, diversity is not a hurdle

but the cornerstone of a collaborative learning process, requiring a pedagogical approach that embraces and utilizes differences as fundamental to achieving educational success.
Caon's (2008,2016) perspective aligns with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which emphasizes the importance of designing educational environments that proactively address the diverse needs of learners. This aligns with Kierkegaard's observation that "ciò che si vede dipende da come si guarda" (Caon, 2016: 9), emphasizing that perspective plays a pivotal role in addressing classroom heterogeneity.
By adopting an open-system framework, the MAC positions the parameter of 'difference'—manifested in varying abilities, learning styles, and experiences—as a critical lens for organizing and delivering effective language instruction. "La CAD, così, si presenta come un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della 'differenza', che si può registrare in più aspetti e su più livelli, è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico di tutti gli studenti" (Caon, 2016: 9).
The UDL guidelines support this by suggesting that "Proper design and presentation of information—the responsibility of any curriculum or instructional methodology—can provide the scaffolds necessary to ensure that all learners have access to knowledge" (CAST, 2018:16) This principle reflects the assertion by Minello (2006) that traditional transmissive methods often fail to accommodate the unique ways students process information: "Per rendersi comprensibili a tutti gli studenti in una modalità trasmissiva, il docente corre il rischio di banalizzare i contenuti, d'abbassare il livello del sapere o d'innalzare i livelli minimi di accettabilità." (in Caon, 2016: 11).

1.3.2 Theoretical Foundations: ZPD and Social Mediation

Central to the functioning of the MAC is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), introduced by Vygotsky, which Caon (2016) integrates into his framework. The ZPD highlights the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guided support (Caon, 2016: 10). Through the lens of the MAC, classrooms become spaces of multiple ZPDs, necessitating the use of socially mediated and tailored strategies to support each learner. UDL's principle of multiple means of action and expression aligns with these tailored strategies, offering learners various ways to demonstrate their understanding and apply their knowledge. As suggested in the UDL guidelines, "It is important to provide alternative modalities for expression, both to level the playing field among learners and to allow the learner to appropriately (or easily) express knowledge, ideas and concepts in the learning environment." (CAST, 2018:20). By aligning Vygotsky's ZPD with UDL's principle of multiple means of action and expression, educators can design scaffolding that allows every learner to progress at their own pace and demonstrate knowledge in diverse ways.
The framework proposed by Caon (2008) emphasizes the importance of leveraging and enhancing and valuing diversity within the classroom through varied teaching methods, flexible classroom organization, and cooperative learning based on mutual help among students. The teaching methodology proposed by Caon (2008) builds on a humanistic approach to language education, emphasizing emotional, relational, and cooperative factors in the classroom. Caon (2008: XII) writes: "Valorizzare le differenze grazie ad una metodologia didattica variata, ad un'organizzazione flessibile della classe (gruppi di livello, gruppi eterogenei), ad una concezione cooperativa e basata sull'aiuto reciproco tra gli studenti, quindi, diventa [il nostro] obiettivo."

Caon (2006, 2008) further identifies three key principles for managing the MAC: a. “Una varietà della didattica all’interno dell’aula”—a variety of teaching methods within the classroom, varying content, materials, and methodologies. (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141) b. “Un’organizzazione flessibile della classe”—flexible classroom organization, respecting groupings of students with similar linguistic learning levels and heterogeneity, paying attention to both struggling and advanced students. (Caon, Tonioli ,2016:141) and c. “Una concezione cooperativa e basata sull’aiuto reciproco tra gli student”—a cooperative approach based on mutual help among students, where students share responsibility for tasks and actively participate in relational dynamics. (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141)

In the context of the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), task differentiation is essential for fostering inclusive and effective learning. It involves creating varied input—both in linguistic complexity and in modes of representation—so that students can engage with content at their own level of competence and through strategies best suited to their learning styles. As stated, "La differenziazione del compito prevede la creazione di input diversificati, sia linguisticamente sia per quanto concerne la modalità di rappresentazione. In questo modo, ogni studente può interiorizzare lessico, strutture, concetti e procedure diverse partendo dalla sua reale competenza comunicativa e attraverso la strategia più consona al suo stile." (in Caon, 2016 :27)

Following Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (discussed in section), differentiation can be implemented by offering students varied learning tasks that cater to their cognitive strengths and preferences. For instance, some students might engage in semantic categorization (e.g., organizing transportation types by function), while others may focus on expanding vocabulary with structured linguistic support.

Balboni (2006) emphasizes the importance of individualized focus, suggesting that while students can receive common input, their engagement with it should be personalized to their abilities. Differentiation can occur in several ways:

- Teaching methodologies and techniques: Some students may struggle with cooperative learning or peer tutoring, requiring structured tasks that gradually introduce collaborative approaches. "Forzare le persone a lavorare con una modalità che non viene né capita né apprezzata [...] può rivelarsi dannoso per l’apprendimento e la relazione in termini motivazionali."(cited in Caon, 2016 :27)
- Lesson pacing and task structuring: By designing differentiated worksheets, students can engage with tasks at a rhythm suited to their capabilities.
- Input calibration: As Pienemann (1998) suggests, distinguishing between "input per la comprensione" (which can include more advanced linguistic forms) and "input per la produzione" (which should be carefully adjusted) allows for gradual linguistic development. (cited in Caon, 2016 :28)

Through these strategies, differentiation not only accommodates learner diversity but also fosters motivation and engagement, ensuring that every student in a MAC can maximize their potential while developing their linguistic and cognitive abilities.

To address the other dynamics, point b) and c) “Un’organizzazione flessibile della classe” and “Una concezione cooperativa e basata sull’aiuto reciproco tra gli studenti” mentioned previously (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141), the MAC perspective emphasises social mediation methodologies, which focus on active, collaborative learning rather than passive information reception. “La strada è quella delle metodologie a ‘mediazione sociale’ che: procedono per costruzione di conoscenze e non per ricezione passiva di informazioni; hanno come focus il gruppo di studenti” (Caon, 2016:11). These methodologies, such as dialogic teaching and

lessons, peer tutoring, cooperative activities, and problem-solving tasks, are supported by UDL's framework, which values collaboration and flexibility in demonstrating understanding. Such approaches not only enhance linguistic skills but also foster metacognitive, social, and intercultural competencies. As Vettorel notes, "ogni studente è una persona unica e diversa," learning in individualized and non-uniform ways (in Caon, 2016:14). In a MAC perspective, effective classroom management is closely linked to democratic leadership, which fosters a 'sense of belonging' among students. This inclusive climate encourages greater willingness to express opinions, loyalty, and prosocial behaviour. Research by Hawley (1976) shows that when teachers respect student perspectives, it correlates positively with peer tolerance and active participation (cited in Caon,2016:25). Additionally, the role of open and meaningful discussions in MAC plays a crucial role in reducing student alienation. Research showed that "la mancanza di partecipazione significativa nella vita scolastica e di classe fosse fortemente correlata con il senso di impotenza e di isolamento degli studenti." (Caon, 2016:25) Allman-Snyder, May, & Garcia (1975) found that classrooms with teacher-facilitated, interactive discussions—rather than traditional, top-down instruction—enhanced students' engagement and social problem-solving skills. This dynamic promotes self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and respect for diverse viewpoints, reinforcing the constructivist and social mediation approach. (Caon, 2016:25)

The MAC is a dynamic environment where diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively harnessed as a resource for effective language learning. According to Caon (2016), the MAC functions as 'un sistema aperto' (an open system) where differences across linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions become the foundation for inclusive and transformative learning. Through the adoption of flexible teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and cooperative dynamics, educators can foster classrooms that address individual needs while promoting collective growth. This systemic approach redefines the role of diversity, positioning it not as a challenge but as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and shared achievement in education. This perspective reframes differences as "la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico di tutti gli studenti" (Caon, 2016: 9). In this framework, diversity becomes a resource that fosters collaborative learning and mutual growth.

1.4 Definitions and International Perspectives (Italian, U.K., and U.S. approaches)

The concept of Mixed Ability Classes (MACs) has been widely studied across different educational systems, each offering unique perspectives on how to define and approach diversity in the classroom. While all classrooms inherently comprise students with varied linguistic backgrounds, cognitive abilities, learning styles, and motivational levels, the strategies used to address this heterogeneity differ across national and theoretical frameworks.

In Italy, the MAC perspective described by Caon is conceptualized as a dynamic and inclusive system where diversity is not a challenge to be managed but a resource that enriches the learning experience. Caon (2016) describes the MAC as "a dynamic system shaped by the individuals within it" and emphasizes that "diversity becomes the key to effective linguistic learning" (Caon 2008: XII). This view aligns with the belief that "all classrooms inherently include a range of student competencies shaped by factors such as age, cognitive development,

linguistic background, and personal motivations" (Celentin,Luise, 2019:5). This inclusive and student-centred approach ensures that diversity is not just acknowledged but actively harnessed to create a richer, more engaging learning environment. In a MAC, learning is not a linear process but a dynamic interplay of individual contributions that shape the collective experience.As Mariani states: "Il processo di apprendimento si realizza in classe, cioè in una dimensione sociale e culturalmente condizionata, in cui la particolarità del singolo si incontra o si scontra con le particolarità di molti altri individui [...] non può non assumere le connotazioni di 'impresa di gruppo', con le dinamiche relazionali e i 'climi' che tutto questo comporta." (Caon, 2016 :22) Thus, teaching in a MAC demands pedagogical flexibility, an appreciation for learner variability, and a commitment to fostering a supportive and equitable classroom culture.

The U.K. perspective often highlights the practical challenges posed by heterogeneity which will be discussed in the section on MACs in the UK. Scholars like Ur (1996:304) arguing that MACs involve differences not only in language proficiency but also in "learning styles, attitudes toward the language, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age or maturity, gender, personality traits, self-confidence, motivation, interest, independence, self-discipline, and level of education". Despite attempts to create homogeneous groups through streaming, it is recognized that "any group of children is a mixed-ability group" (Bailey, Bridges 1983:5), reinforcing the idea that diversity is an unavoidable reality in education.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., scholars emphasize differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogical frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure that all students have equitable access to meaningful learning experiences. Tomlinson (2001:5) describes differentiated instruction as a practice that "proactively plans varied approaches to content, process, and product to ensure that every student engages with learning at an appropriate level". She further explains that "students learn better if tasks are a close match for their skills and understanding of a topic (readiness), if tasks ignite curiosity or passion in a student (interest), and if the assignment encourages students to work in a preferred manner (learning profile)" (Tomlinson 2001:45).

This section explores these differing international perspectives, shedding light on the varied ways in which MACs are understood and implemented in educational settings. By examining the Italian emphasis on inclusivity and cooperation, the U.K.'s pragmatic approach to managing diversity, and the U.S.'s structured differentiation strategies, a more comprehensive understanding of MACs and their impact on learning emerges.

1.5 The Mixed Ability Class (MAC) in Italy: A Dynamic Perspective

In Italy, the concept of the Mixed Ability Class (MAC) has been extensively explored by the Venetian School of Language Education and other scholars, emphasizing diversity as a dynamic and integral component of the classroom environment. Caon (2016:9) defines the MAC as a dynamic system shaped by the individuals within it, a "sistema dinamico caratterizzato dall'apporto di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso," viewing diversity not as an obstacle but as a resource for facilitating effective language learning. This

perspective shifts the understanding of the MAC from being merely a collection of diverse learners to an "open system where diversity becomes the key to effective linguistic learning" (Caon 2008: XII).

As Caon (2008) explains, humanistic education is critical for meaningful learning, drawing on Rogers (1969) and Novak (1998) to emphasize empathy, cooperation, and learner-centred approaches. (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141)

Within this framework, teachers are encouraged to value differences among students by employing flexible teaching strategies and fostering cooperation and peer support. Classroom organization often includes heterogeneous groupings and level-based subdivisions to address the needs of both struggling and advanced students. (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141) In fact, it is suggested to employ "un'organizzazione flessibile della classe' che rispetti la divisione in gruppi di alunni con lo stesso livello di apprendimento linguistico e quindi eterogenei e che presti attenzione tanto al recupero degli studenti con difficoltà quanto degli studenti eccellenti" (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141)

In addition, Italian scholars such as Celentin and Luise (2019:5) highlight the universal nature of mixed-ability classrooms, asserting that "Tutte le classi sono ad abilità differenziate" emphasizing that all classrooms inherently include a range of student competencies shaped by factors such as age, cognitive development, linguistic background, and personal motivations. These differences transform classrooms into dynamic learning environments. This perspective is reflected in UDL's principle of multiple means of representation, which advocates for presenting information in diverse formats to accommodate various learning styles and cognitive strengths.

Luise (2003) describes each student in a MAC as a 'diversely competent learner', stating, "Il principio dal quale oggi nessun insegnante può prescindere è che non ci si può trovare di fronte una classe di persone ugualmente ignoranti, ma ci si trova di fronte, sempre, ad una classe di individui diversamente competenti" (Celentin,Luise, 2019: 5).

Torresan (2015) provides a vivid metaphor for the MAC comparing it to lifts where students enter at their own pace and reach different floors. Some may reach higher floors, while others stop at intermediate levels, but all experience growth: "A classe conclusa, ognuno studente può lasciare l'aula con il sentimento di aver fatto qualcosa che lo ha messo alla prova e di aver conseguito un certo risultato" (cited in Celentin, Luise, 2019:5). This metaphor aligns with UDL's principle of multiple means of action and expression, which offers learners diverse pathways to demonstrate their knowledge and achieve success and reflects UDL's emphasis on personalized scaffolding and multiple pathways for success. "Scaffolds are foreseen by the teacher to overcome the learning challenges without simplifying the established goals" (Galkienė,Monkevičienėė, 2021:15). Culture of collaboration is implemented by preparing the environment which can foster collaboration, introducing scaffolds to overcome possible barriers. "The teacher is a partner in learner collaboration." (Galkienė, Monkevičienėė, 2021:15)

The central motto for MAC educators reflects this inclusivity: "Not all students learn the same thing, but all learn something" (Celentin, Luise, 2019: 6), promoting a classroom ethos where diverse outcomes are equally valued. UDL reinforces this ethos by ensuring that instructional strategies, scaffolding and assessments are designed to be flexible and adaptable, celebrating the unique strengths and abilities of all learners with the aim to be an 'expert' learner, and the best learner they can. (CAST 2018:17)

1.5.1 Flexible Methodologies and UDL Integration

The MAC benefits from a range of learner-centred methodologies that align with UDL principles:

1. Differentiated techniques: Tailored tasks accommodate varying proficiencies. For instance, closed techniques assess specific skills, while open techniques encourage collaboration and inclusivity (Rose, 1997 in Celentin, Luise, 2019:9). These approaches reflect UDL's emphasis on providing multiple means of engagement, allowing students to access learning in ways that resonate with their individual readiness and interests. (CAST, 2018:5)
2. Socially mediated learning: Cooperative learning and peer tutoring leverage diversity as a resource. As the principle of "docendo discitur" (we learn by teaching) demonstrates, teaching peers fosters deep understanding and skill development (Celentin, Luise, 2019:9). UDL's focus on collaboration aligns with this methodology, fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. (CAST, 2018:9)
3. Experiential and multisensory methods: Strategies such as play-based learning and multisensory approaches engage diverse learners effectively. Krashen's "rule of forgetting" explains how experiential learning enhances retention by reducing cognitive pressure (Celentin, Luise, 2019:8). UDL's principle of multiple means of representation reinforces the value of diverse instructional methods that cater to varying sensory and cognitive preferences. (CAST, 2018:11)
4. Focus on autonomy, reflection, and self-awareness: Techniques like journaling, self-assessment, and open-ended tasks encourage learners to monitor and adapt their strategies, fostering lifelong learning (Celentin, Luise, 2019:7). UDL emphasizes the importance of empowering students to take ownership of their learning, supporting reflective practices that nurture self-regulation and independence. When the possibilities for constant reflections on their own learning is created, students' engagement in their own learning is fostered, which leads to the development of "the motivation, the practice, the reflection, the self- efficacy, the self-regulation, the self-determination, the executive functioning, the comprehension, and the situational awareness" (Meyer et al. 2014:15).

By adopting flexible timing, personalized activities, and a focus on collaboration and creativity, Italian educators in line with the MAC perspective ensure that diversity is not just accommodated but celebrated as a strength. The holistic frameworks offered by scholars such as Celentin, Luise (2019) and Caon (2016) exemplify how the MAC can become an inclusive space where every student thrives.

1.6 U.K. Perspectives on MACs

1.6.1 Defining and Conceptualizing Mixed-Ability Classes

While the Venetian school views the MAC as a dynamic system rich with opportunities for mutual growth, U.K scholars and authors often emphasize the challenges these classrooms present and propose practical strategies to address them. For example, Ur (1996:302) refers to heterogeneous classes as "classes whose members are particularly or unusually heterogeneous". Ur (1996:302) critiques the term "mixed-ability," suggesting that it overly

focuses on “ability” in the language classroom where there are marked differences in level of performance in the foreign language while diversity extends beyond this singular dimension. In fact, Ur (1996) defines MACs as classes where students differ across a wide range of factors, including “language level, cultural background, learning styles, attitudes toward the language, native language, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age or maturity, gender, personality traits, self-confidence, motivation, interest, independence, self-discipline, and level of education.” (Ur, 1996:304)
The concept of Mixed Ability Classes (MACs) is a universal reality and a dynamic challenge in education. Hess (2001:2) defines mixed-ability classes more so as multi-level and are those where students have varying levels of ability, motivation, and learning needs. This diversity can present challenges but also opportunities for differentiated instruction and fostering a collaborative learning environment. Hicks (1997) goes on to affirm that “In any class with more than one student, you will find a range of abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, just as you would in any group of 25 to 30 people.” (Hicks in Littlejohn, Hicks, 1997:79) This diversity, also known as heterogeneity, is often seen as something to be avoided. The term 'mixed ability' tends to carry negative connotations; year groups are 'streamed' using entrance tests to create homogeneous groups where the stronger students are together, and the weaker students are grouped separately. However, strengths shown in entrance tests, often grammar-based, may hide weaknesses in other areas, which become evident over time. As the term or year progresses, different strengths and weaknesses, abilities, and proficiencies emerge, making the class more heterogeneous. This situation is typical in classrooms worldwide.” (Hicks in Littlejohn, Hicks1997:79) Therefore, as seen, even when attempts are made to create homogeneous classes, the reality is that classrooms remain inherently mixed in their composition.

1.6.2 Characteristics and Challenges in the MAC

Tice (1997) affirms this by noting that the MAC is characterized by “students with different levels of language knowledge, skills, learning speeds, and varying degrees of motivation” (Tice,1997 in Caon, Tonioli, 2016:5). These differences can manifest in students' participation levels and their ability to engage with course materials.
Bailey and Bridges (1983) point out the variety of practices under the name ‘mixed ability’, particularly in secondary schools that have ‘unstreamed’ policies. It explains that mixed-ability classes are organized based on factors such as school intake, age range, special provisions, class formation methods, and curriculum organization. These variables contribute to the creation of mixed-ability classes, demonstrating that “any group of children is a mixed-ability group” (Bailey,Bridges, 1983:5).
“Streaming or banding merely disguises and ignores differences in abilities and rates of progress and equally presents the problems (often unrecognised) of stretching the brightest pupils and maintaining the understanding of the less able in the class. Mixed ability classes force teachers to recognise these problems” (Bailey,Bridges 1983:17) This perspective highlights the inherent heterogeneity in classrooms and emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing individual needs within these diverse, heterogeneous groups.

1.6.3 Comparing U.K and Venetian Perspectives

These definitions and discussions provide a foundation for comparison with the Venetian school's more dynamic, systemic perspective of the MAC. While the U.K. definitions generally describe the diversity as challenges, they are less focused on leveraging diversity as a resource for systemic classroom dynamics, as emphasized by the Venetian approach. However, both frameworks underline the need for inclusivity and adaptation in teaching strategies.
Both Italian and international perspectives emphasize the need to embrace this diversity through adaptive and inclusive teaching strategies. The Italian approach, as described by Caon (2008) and Celentin and Luise (2019), highlights the importance of cooperative activities and dialogic lessons to foster both social and cognitive growth. Meanwhile, international frameworks, such as those proposed by Hess (2001) and Bailey and Bridges (1983), advocate for differentiated tasks, group activities, and structured methodologies to address the diverse needs of learners effectively. Together, these perspectives reveal that MACs are not static environments to be controlled but evolving spaces where teachers and students co-construct knowledge through interaction and collaboration.
This systemic view of the MAC lays the foundation for exploring specific strategies, such as language learning and metacognitive techniques, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

1.7 U.S. perspective of MACs

According to Tomlinson (2001) Mixed-Ability Classes (MACs) in the U.S. are classrooms where students exhibit a wide range of "readiness" levels, interests, and learning profiles, often requiring differentiated approaches to instruction due to a variety of factors, including culture, learning styles, and personal preferences (Tomlinson 2001:vii).
This diversity calls for a teaching approach that goes beyond traditional methods of instruction, emphasizing depth over rote learning. Differentiated instruction responds to this complexity by offering a framework that prioritizes meaningful and transferable learning.
As Tomlinson (2001:74) explains, "Differentiated instruction is so powerful because it focuses on concepts and principles instead of on facts. Teachers who differentiate instruction offer minimal drill and practice of facts (as these practices tend to create little meaning or power for future learning); they focus instead on essential and meaningful understandings to create transferable learning power.

1.7.1 Readiness as a Starting Point for Learning

To achieve this, differentiated instruction draws on three key characteristics, as mentioned above, of students—readiness, interest, and learning profile. These elements guide how teachers design content, processes, and products that address individual learning needs.
Tomlinson (2001:45) states, these three characteristics of students-readiness, interest, and learning profile- guide differentiation. "We know that students learn better if tasks are a close match for their skills and understanding of a topic (readiness), if tasks ignite curiosity or passion in a student (interest), and if the assignment encourages students to work in a preferred

manner (learning profile)". These characteristics are foundational to creating an inclusive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students in MACs.
Readiness refers to a student's current level of knowledge, understanding, and skill in relation to a specific task or concept. Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes that students often begin at different starting points across subjects or even within a single topic. Differentiation begins with assessing readiness to provide tasks that are appropriately challenging. She notes that "students learn better if tasks are a close match for their skills and understanding of a topic" (Tomlinson, 2001:45). Moreover, the "meaning-making process is influenced by the student's prior understandings, interests, beliefs, how the student learns best, and the student's attitudes about self and school" (Tomlinson, 2001:8). She further argues that "learning takes place most effectively in classrooms where knowledge is clearly and powerfully organized, students are highly active in the learning process, assessments are rich and varied, and students feel a sense of safety and connection" (Tomlinson, 2001:8).

1.7.2 Incorporating Student Interests

Interest refers to topics, activities, or ideas that engage and motivate students. Tomlinson (2001:52) asserts, "If a student has a spark (or better still, a fire) of curiosity about a topic, learning is more likely for that student". Connecting academic content to students' interests enhances their engagement and promotes deeper learning. Teachers are encouraged to design lessons that incorporate what students find compelling, using strategies such as choice boards or independent study projects to align academic material with personal interests. (Tomlinson, 2001:80)

1.7.3 Recognizing Learning Profiles

Learning profiles represent the unique "ways in which we learn best as individuals" (Tomlinson 2001:60), encompassing factors such as learning style, intelligence preferences, gender, and culture. Tomlinson (2001:60) explains that "when teachers can tap into routes that promote efficient and effective learning for students, results are better." The goal of learning-profile differentiation is twofold: to help students recognize the learning modes that work best for them and to provide diverse options that ensure a good fit within the classroom.
A student's learning style involves environmental or personal preferences. Some students thrive in dynamic, visually rich spaces, while others require minimal distractions in a simpler environment. Similarly, some learn best through auditory methods, while others excel through tactile or movement-based activities. Although teachers cannot tailor every classroom element all the time, they can provide choices and design spaces with varied setups to cater to different preferences. As Tomlinson (2001:62) notes, "It is possible for a teacher to create a room with different 'looks' in different portions of the room or with differing working arrangements."

1.7.4 The Role of Intelligence Preferences

Intelligence preferences further shape how students engage with material. Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences highlights strengths such as verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, and bodily-kinaesthetic, among others. For instance, a student with strong visual-spatial intelligence might excel when working with diagrams or visual aids. Complementing this, Robert Sternberg (1985) identifies analytical, practical, and creative intelligences, which emphasize different approaches: linear problem-solving, real-world applications, and innovation. (Tomlinson, 2001:62). Tomlinson (2001:62) points out that "when students approach learning in ways that address their intelligence preferences, results are quite positive."

1.7.5 Addressing Gender and Cultural Preferences

"Gender also influences how we learn. As is the case with culture, there are learning patterns in each gender—but great variance, as well." (Tomlinson, 2001:62)
While some males may prefer competitive tasks, others might lean toward collaborative efforts, just as females exhibit similar variability. Cultural differences further determine whether a student learns best through contextual and personal material or discrete and impersonal content. Culture may also affect how a student processes time, expresses emotions, or prefers whole-to-part versus part-to-whole learning approaches. Teachers are reminded, "The goal is not to suggest that individuals from a particular culture ought to learn in a particular way, but rather to come to understand the great range of learning preferences that will exist in any group of people." (Tomlinson, 2001:62)

1.7.6 Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes the importance of flexibility in addressing these diverse needs. A skilled teacher understands that students' learning preferences often differ from their own and strives to create opportunities that accommodate everyone. "A sensitive teacher understands that her students may have learning preferences much like or much different than that of the teacher and tries to create options and choices that make everyone comfortable much of the time." (Tomlinson, 2001:62)
By recognizing and incorporating learning profiles into classroom design and instruction, teachers can foster an environment that resonates with individual learners. This approach ensures equitable opportunities for all students to thrive, regardless of their unique strengths and preferences.
Tomlinson (2001:5) describes differentiation as a framework for proactively planning varied approaches to content, process, and product to ensure that every student engages with learning at an appropriate level. She emphasizes that good educators should not see "differentiation as a strategy or something to do when there's extra time. Rather, it is a way of life in the classroom". Content refers to what students learn, process focuses on how they make sense of information, and product relates to how they demonstrate their understanding (Tomlinson,

2001: 6-7). Differentiating these three elements ensures that instruction meets the unique needs of students, allowing them to grow and succeed.

In the MAC, flexible grouping is a core strategy that enables students to work in dynamic configurations—individually, in pairs, or in groups—depending on the task. For instance, advanced learners might explore more complex problems in small groups, while students requiring more support might work on scaffolded tasks designed to build foundational skills. Curriculum compacting, for example, which is a strategy is "specifically designed to help advanced learners maximize their use of time for learning" (Tomlinson, 2001:74) is another widely used method for advanced learners, streamlining instruction by removing redundant material and allowing for deeper exploration of topics. "Having students become adept at determining and predicting patterns" and tools such as visual aids are particularly effective for second-language learners, helping them process and retain new vocabulary" (Tomlinson, 2001:74).

Tomlinson (2001) highlights the importance of creating classrooms where students feel safe to take risks and actively engage with the curriculum. Tomlinson (2001:6) emphasises that "In a differentiated classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches to content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs.," reinforcing the need for ongoing assessment and adaptation to meet the unique needs of each class. Internationally, educators adopt methodologies aligned with these principles, such as inquiry-based learning, peer-assisted strategies, and hands-on activities. These approaches foster critical thinking and encourage shared responsibility for learning while ensuring that diversity is viewed as a strength rather than a challenge.

Tomlinson (2001) advocates for a responsive and dynamic approach to teaching in the MAC, where differentiation becomes a mindset rather than a set of isolated strategies. She emphasizes that educators should not view "differentiation as a strategy or something to do when there's extra time. Rather, it is a way of life in the classroom." (Tomlinson 2001:5). By embracing diversity and offering multiple pathways for learning, teachers can create inclusive, effective, and equitable learning environments where all students, regardless of their starting points, have the opportunity to succeed.

1.7.7 Comparison of U.S. and Caon's Perspectives on the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC)

The U.S. approach to Mixed-Ability Classes (MACs), as articulated by Tomlinson (2001), and Caon's (2008,2016) perspective share a fundamental recognition of diversity within classrooms but differ in how they conceptualize and respond to it. Both perspectives offer distinct frameworks for leveraging this diversity to foster inclusive and effective learning.

In the U.S. framework, Tomlinson (2001:74) defines MACs as classrooms where students exhibit a range of "readiness" levels, interests, and learning profiles. These differences, influenced by factors such as culture, personal preferences, and learning styles, necessitate an approach that goes beyond traditional methods. Tomlinson emphasizes the power of differentiated instruction, which she describes as focusing on "concepts and principles instead of predominantly on facts." This approach shifts the focus from rote learning to meaningful and transferable understanding, ensuring that lessons resonate with the diverse needs of students. She explains, "Teachers who differentiate instruction offer minimal drill and practice

of facts… they focus instead on essential and meaningful understandings to create transferable learning power" (Tomlinson 2001:74).
In contrast, Caon's perspective views the MAC not merely as collections of individuals with unique needs but as dynamic systems where diversity is actively embraced as a resource for learning. Caon (2016:9) describes the MAC as "un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della 'differenza', che si può registrare in più aspetti e su più livelli, è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico." This highlights the belief that differences in linguistic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions should not be seen as challenges but as assets to enhance the learning process. Caon further elaborates that the MAC is "un sistema dinamico caratterizzato dall'apporto di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso" (Caon 2016:9), emphasizing the interdependence of learners within the classroom system. For Caon, diversity is not simply acknowledged but actively utilized to create a collaborative environment where all students contribute to and benefit from the shared learning experience.
Another key distinction lies in how the two approaches address motivation and engagement. Tomlinson underscores the importance of designing tasks that align with students' interests to ignite curiosity and deepen learning. She states, "If a student has a spark (or better still, a fire) of curiosity about a topic, learning is more likely for that student" (Tomlinson 2001:52). Teachers are encouraged to incorporate strategies such as choice boards or independent study projects, tailoring content to reflect students' passions.
On the other hand, Caon (2016) integrates motivation within a humanistic educational framework, grounded in glottodidactics and enriched by social constructivist principles. His approach emphasizes the interplay of emotional, relational, and cognitive dimensions in creating meaningful learning experiences. "Tale metodologia trova i suoi fondamenti nella visione umanistica della glottodidattica che pone le basi per un apprendimento significativo", which is described as being "caratterizzato dall'attenzione alle dinamiche relazionali presenti in classe, dall'unicità degli apprendenti, dalla cooperazione e dall'ascolto attivo" (Caon, Tonioli, 2016:141). These humanistic values are complemented by constructivist elements, which emphasize that motivation is nurtured through relationships and shared understanding. Learning, in this view, is socially mediated, with students collaborating and supporting each other as active participants in the classroom environment.
Caon (2016:10) further highlights the transformative potential of inclusivity in fostering engagement, stating, "Inclusività significa non vedere la differenza come un limite ma come una risorsa per la crescita collettiva". For Caon, the classroom is a dynamic system where diversity is not only acknowledged but actively utilized to motivate learners and enhance collective growth. Unlike Tomlinson's focus on tailored individual strategies to meet learners' readiness and interests, Caon's humanistic-constructivist perspective positions motivation as emerging from the emotional connections, cooperative learning, and relational trust fostered within the group.
This dual framework, blending humanistic principles of empathy, active listening, and relational focus with constructivist practices of collaboration, cooperation and social mediation, underscores Caon's belief that motivation and engagement thrive in inclusive, socially connected environments. By emphasizing diversity as a resource and cultivating a shared learning experience, Caon redefines motivation as a product of both personal relationships and group dynamics, enriching both individual and collective success.
Both perspectives advocate for flexible teaching strategies, yet they differ in their implementation. Tomlinson's differentiation framework revolves around tailoring the content, process, and product of learning to match each student's readiness, interests, and learning

profiles. Tomlinson (2001:5) explains that differentiation involves "proactively planning varied approaches to content, process, and product to ensure that every student engages with learning at an appropriate level". In practice, this includes techniques like curriculum compacting, scaffolded tasks, and flexible grouping to meet individual needs. In contrast, Caon's (2008,2016) approach prioritizes cooperative and reciprocal learning, utilizing open-ended tasks and stratified worksheets to encourage collaboration and interdependence. Caon describes the MAC as a space where the focus is on diverse learners engaging in shared tasks that benefit from their unique strengths and "hanno come focus il gruppo di studenti, considerati risorse e origine dell'apprendimento e che quindi vanno stimolati attraverso forme anche dialogiche di lezione, attività di problem solving, schede di lavoro differenti, proposte di attività cooperative o di tutoraggio tra pari per favorire la loro partecipazione attiva" (Caon, 2016:11)

Finally, the philosophical underpinnings of the two approaches reflect their differing educational goals. Tomlinson envisions MACs as spaces where teachers help students achieve independent success through differentiation, which she sees as integral to teaching. She states, "In a differentiated classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches to content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs" (Tomlinson, 2001:6).

Caon's (2008,2016) approach is rooted in a systemic and collective philosophy, where the MAC is viewed as a dynamic and open system that thrives on diversity. Caon (2016:9) emphasizes that diversity is not a limitation but a resource for learning, stating that the MAC should be understood as "un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della 'differenza'... è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell'apprendimento linguistico di tutti gli studenti". Caon (2016:9) further explains that this approach involves transforming "l'eterogeneità della classe da problema percepito a risorsa" (classroom heterogeneity from a perceived problem into a resource)

Instead of focusing on individual differentiation per se, Caon (2008,2016) emphasizes the interconnectedness of learners within the classroom, where cooperative dynamics and shared contributions foster growth. His systemic perspective positions diversity as the foundation for innovation and improvement, underscoring its potential to enrich both the individual and collective learning experience.

While Tomlinson (2001) and Caon (2016) share a recognition of diversity as a central feature of the MAC, their approaches diverge significantly. Tomlinson focuses on differentiation as a strategy to meet individual needs, enabling personal success through tailored instruction. Caon, however, takes a systemic view, framing diversity as a collective resource that enriches the entire classroom. His perspective emphasizes collaboration, interdependence, and the transformative power of inclusivity. Together, these frameworks highlight the importance of flexible, responsive teaching but offer distinct methodologies and goals for addressing the challenges of diversity in modern classrooms.

1.8 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be seen that across these frameworks, a shared theme emerges: diversity, when effectively managed, enriches learning for all students. The Italian perspective, informed by Caon's systemic vision of the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), celebrates diversity as a collaborative resource. By framing the MAC as "un sistema dinamico" (a dynamic system),

Caon emphasizes that the diversity among learners is not merely a challenge to be managed but a resource that enriches the classroom environment (Caon 2016:9). This perspective aligns with the role of metacognitive strategies, which empower learners to recognize and draw on their unique strengths and contributions while fostering personal growth and collaboration within the system.

This thesis builds on Caon's dynamic framework by focusing on the role of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and their connection to metacognitive practices. Specifically, it investigates how in-service and preservice primary school teachers personally utilize LLS, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation, both in their own language learning and in their intended English language classroom applications. Teachers play a crucial role in managing the complexities of the MAC, and this study examines whether they are aware of and capable of implementing metacognitive strategies to support their learners effectively. As Caon (2008: XII) states, "La CAD […] è da intendersi non tanto come la realtà delle classi ma piuttosto come un modo di osservare la realtà delle classi" (MAC are not simply the reality of classrooms but a way of observing the reality of classrooms). This thesis adopts this perspective, using the MAC as a lens to explore how diversity can shape and enrich English language instruction. "The MAC" when mentioned will refer to Caon's perspective.

Through a questionnaire-based methodology, the research addresses two key areas: (1) teachers' personal use of LLS and their metacognitive awareness, and (2) their plans for applying these strategies in the context of English language classrooms. Scenario-based questions and reflective responses will provide insights into how well teachers align with theoretical principles of LLS, foster metacognitive strategies and their readiness to foster inclusive practices in the inevitably mixed ability classroom. By bridging the gap between personal strategy use and classroom implementation, the study aims to uncover the extent to which teachers are prepared to navigate the complexities of the MAC.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored mixed-ability classrooms (MAC) and the various approaches used to address learner diversity. By integrating Caon's systemic perspective of the MAC, this discussion has underscored the importance of adaptable and inclusive teaching strategies that cater to students with varying levels of proficiency, learning styles, and needs. The next chapters will build upon this foundation, exploring Individual Differences (IDs), the theoretical underpinnings of LLS, metacognitive strategies and analyse the findings that emerge from this study.

2 THE MIXED-ABILITY CLASS, INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

In today's classrooms, diversity is not just a reality—it is a defining characteristic of the learning experience. The Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) offers a framework and perspective to understand and manage this diversity in language learning. Rather than viewing heterogeneous classrooms as a challenge, the MAC, considered as a perspective, positions differences as an opportunity for inclusive and effective instruction. According to Caon (2008: XII) "La CAD va intesa non come una somma di persone differenti ma come un sistema dinamico caratterizzato dall'apporto di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso." This is the view of MAC adopted in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

This learner-centred approach contrasts with traditional transmissive methods, which focus on rigid content delivery and assume that all students can process information in the same way. These methods risk marginalizing students by failing to provide the flexibility necessary for equitable learning experiences (Minello, 2006 in (Caon,2016: 11). Instead, the MAC recognizes that students enter the classroom with different linguistic backgrounds, cognitive styles, and learning needs, requiring flexible and adaptive teaching methods. This shift aligns with a broader sociocultural perspective on learning, particularly Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the role of scaffolding and peer interaction in language acquisition (Vygotskij,1934).

As Caon (2016:10) states, "ciò rimanda alle funzioni di scaffolding (sostegno) e di tutoring (tutorato) che possono essere svolte dal docente, ma anche dagli stessi compagni impegnati a supportare e sostenere l'apprendimento degli altri in attività didattiche organizzate per coppie o piccoli gruppi".

Building on this foundation, this chapter explores two key aspects of teaching in the mixed-ability classroom:

1. Individual differences in language learning – Examining, among others, cognitive, socio-cultural, and affective factors that influence how students acquire a new language.
2. Language learning strategies (LLS) – Investigating how IDs may influence the awareness of and adoption of LLS as tools to support diverse learners and foster autonomy and the role within the MAC.

This emphasises, as Cisotto (2005) postulates: "Uno degli obiettivi prioritari dell'istruzione è quello di portare ogni alunno a saper gestire in autonomia il proprio apprendimento, attraverso il controllo delle attività di comprensione, di soluzione dei problemi e l'adozione flessibile di strategie" (in Caon, 2016:86). That is, instruction should prioritize the awareness of and autonomy in learning and strategy use.

By integrating theoretical insights with practical strategies, this discussion aims to highlight how the MAC seen as a perspective can be structured to accommodate diversity, promote inclusive learning, and empower students to take control of their language acquisition journey. This chapter explores the role of individual differences (IDs)—such as personality traits, cognitive styles, motivation, aptitude, and intelligence types—in shaping students' engagement within the MAC with language learning strategies (LLS). As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015;1) state, "Understanding learner variations is an essential part of the study of second language acquisition (SLA) in general".

2.1 Individual Differences: An Overview

IDs are not fixed traits, but evolving constructs shaped by time and context (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:6). They include both vertical distinctions, such as language aptitude, and horizontal distinctions, which involve unique learner profiles without hierarchical implications (Caon, 2008 in Caon, 2016:15). This nuanced understanding aligns with Caon's (2016) conceptualization of the MAC, which reframes diversity as a systemic lens for fostering engagement and inclusivity. Within this perspective, the MAC emphasizes the dynamic interplay between universal and unique learner characteristics, treating diversity as an opportunity to create environments that support collective growth and learning innovation.

The increasing recognition of learner diversity in second language acquisition (SLA) has led to a growing body of research on Individual Differences (IDs) and their impact on language learning. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:1) emphasize, "understanding learner variations is an essential part of the study of second language acquisition (SLA) in general". This suggests that factors such as aptitude, motivation, learning strategies, and personality traits play an integral role in shaping students' engagement with language learning. Similarly, Griffiths and Soruç (2021:340) state that "there is no absolute consensus on what constitutes an individual difference (ID) in language learning" highlighting the complexity of learner variability.

A review of the literature highlights that "there is no absolute consensus on what constitutes an individual difference (ID) in language learning" (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:340). Skehan (1989) was among the first to extensively discuss IDs, listing factors such as aptitude, motivation, learning strategies, extroversion/introversion, risk-taking, intelligence, field dependence/independence, and anxiety. Over time, different scholars have proposed varying lists of IDs, reflecting the complex and evolving nature of the field. For example, Dörnyei (2005) focused on personality, aptitude, motivation, strategies, and beliefs, while Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011) included strategies, autonomy, personality, gender, and self-efficacy. Pawlak (2012) considered aptitude, age, intelligence, affect, and motivation as critical IDs. (in Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:340)

Based on these perspectives, Griffiths and Soruç (2021) define individual differences as characteristics that make learners unique and influence their learning behaviour both inside and outside the classroom. Their classification of IDs includes 11 key factors, each of which plays a distinct role in language acquisition. Thes include age, gender, race/nationality/ethnicity/culture, aptitude, personality, learning style, strategies, autonomy, beliefs, affect/emotion and motivation. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:341-345)

(Li, Hiver et al.,2022:4) state that regardless of the taxonomy used to categorise and define IDs and given the lack of consensus "The significance of ID factors lies in their predictive power on learning outcomes, their explanatory functions in the mechanisms of L2 learning, and their implications for the practice of language teaching and learning". Their analysis of research undertaken on IDs and second language acquisition (SLA) highlights that "empirical evidence on particular ID variables, such as language aptitude (Li, 2016), motivation (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003), anxiety (Zhang, 2019), and working memory (Linck et al., 2014)" have been seen to have profound effects on L2 achievements. (cited in Li, Hiver et al. 2022:5)

In addition, ID research has enhanced understanding of language learning mechanisms by examining key theoretical debates in SLA. It explores whether implicit and explicit cognitive abilities impact L2 proficiency differently and whether early and late bilinguals acquire a second language through distinct ID-related processes (Granena, 2013 in Li, Hiver et al., 2022:5). Additionally, it investigates how declarative and procedural memory contribute at

different stages of learning (Hamrick, 2015), providing empirical insights into how language learning evolves over time. (Li, Hiver et al., 2022:5)

The findings of Individual Differences (IDs) research have significant pedagogical implications, particularly in the context of the Mixed-Ability Classroom (MAC), where diverse learner traits necessitate differentiated instructional approaches. One of the key insights from ID research is that strategy training should be adapted based on learners' ID profiles. According to Li, Hiver et al. (2022:5), explicit strategy instruction is essential, as learners' cognitive styles, aptitudes, and personality traits influence how they acquire and retain language. This aligns with Caon's perspective on the MAC, which emphasizes learning pathways to optimize student engagement and performance. Supporting this, research suggests that "instruction that matches learners' cognitive strengths is more effective than instruction that does not" (Wesche, 1981 in Li, Hiver et al. 2022: 5), reinforcing the necessity for educators to tailor instructional methods to individual learners' strengths and preferences.

Beyond cognitive factors, IDs also significantly affect learners' motivation, anxiety, and working memory, which should inform pedagogical decisions in the MAC. For example, listening comprehension has been found to be more anxiety-inducing than other language skills. As Zhang (2019) notes, "Anxiety has stronger associations with listening than speaking, writing, and reading, suggesting that teachers should make a special effort to reduce learners' anxiety and mitigate the harmful effects of anxiety in listening activities or assessments" (cited in Li, Hiver et al. 2022:5). One effective intervention to alleviate listening anxiety includes "allowing students to view questions before starting to listen or providing background information about the listening activity" (Zhang, 2019 in Li, Hiver et al. 2022:5). Such scaffolding strategies align with Caon's approach of differentiated instruction, ensuring that all learners—regardless of their anxiety levels—have the necessary support to succeed.

Additionally, ID research highlights the importance of adaptive, learner-centred instruction in the MAC. Papi (2018) highlights the need to "adapt instruction and utilize activities that fit learners of different ID profiles", (cited in Li, Hiver et al.2022:5) which is particularly relevant in the MAC where students vary widely in abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs. By integrating IDs into instructional planning, educators can create dynamic, inclusive classrooms that not only accommodate diversity but leverage it as a resource for collective growth. This perspective echoes Caon's belief that the MAC should not be seen as a challenge but as an opportunity to foster meaningful, differentiated, and interactive learning experiences that cater to each student's unique individual strengths and needs.

2.1.1 Defining Individual Differences in Language Education

In language education, individual differences (IDs) refer to the unique traits, abilities, and learning preferences that influence how students acquire, process, and use language. These differences are crucial in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), where learners bring diverse linguistic backgrounds, cognitive styles, motivations, and socio-emotional needs into the classroom.

Traditionally, IDs have been viewed as stable characteristics, as noted by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015). That is, "The classic definition of IDs considers them enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree." (Dörnyei,Ryan, 2015:3) However, recent research challenges this static perspective, emphasizing contextual

and temporal variations in how IDs manifest. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:6) argue: "Individual learner characteristics are not stable but show salient temporal and situational variation."
This dynamic view of IDs aligns closely with Caon's perspective of the MAC, where learner diversity is not a fixed variable, but a continuously evolving force shaped by classroom interactions, instructional methods, and socio-emotional factors. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:8)further state, "IDs are better seen as ongoing, evolving constructs rather than stable learner traits."
This perspective is essential for the perspective of the MAC, which sees diversity as a resource rather than a challenge. According to Caon (2008, 2016), the MAC emphasizes a dynamic approach and adaptability in teaching, encouraging differentiated instruction that responds to learners' evolving needs.

2.1.2 Categories of Individual Differences in the MAC

Research highlights several core ID categories that influence language acquisition:

2.1.2.1 Cognitive Differences

Language aptitude has long been regarded as a key determinant of SLA success. Skehan (1994) describes aptitude as "a specific talent for language learning, independent of abilities in other fields and relatively stable in its operation, that is, relatively non-teachable" (cited in Caon, 2016:21). Learners with high aptitude typically grasp linguistic structures more quickly, use cognitive strategies more effectively, and exhibit greater grammatical sensitivity. However, recent studies (Griffiths & Soruç, 2021:342) challenge the assumption that aptitude is entirely fixed, "aptitude concept presents a somewhat intricate picture, utilizing various combinations of individual characteristics to form aptitude complexes. Not only that, but it is potentially dynamic and emerging" suggesting that strategic instruction and explicit metacognitive training can enhance learners' abilities.
Working memory is another crucial cognitive factor influencing SLA. Li, Hiver et al. (2022:5) state that "working memory capacity significantly impacts second language proficiency, particularly in tasks requiring complex sentence processing, listening comprehension, and real-time speech production". Learners with higher working memory often engage in self-monitoring and self-correction strategies, while those with lower working memory capacity benefit from structured, scaffolded tasks that minimize cognitive overload.

2.1.2.2 The Role of Motivation

As Dörnyei (2005:7) states, "motivation is one of the principal learner variables and must be closely examined when addressing individual differences from an educational perspective". Highly motivated learners are more likely to engage in self-regulated learning, seek out opportunities for language use, and persist through difficulties. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model differentiates between:

- Instrumental motivation, which is driven by practical goals such as career advancement or academic success.
- Integrative motivation, which stems from a desire to connect with the target language community.

The MAC contains learners with varying degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, necessitating diverse instructional approaches that link learning tasks to students' personal goals and interests.

2.1.2.3 Affective and Emotional Differences

Anxiety, conversely, can hinder SLA by inhibiting participation and increasing cognitive load. Krashen (1982) states that "Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety" (Krashen, 1982:31). Zhang (2019) found that "anxiety has stronger associations with listening than speaking, writing, and reading, suggesting that teachers should make a special effort to reduce learners' anxiety and mitigate the harmful effects of anxiety in listening activities or assessments" (in Li, Hiver et al. 2022:5). Given that the MAC contains students with varying levels of language anxiety, creating a supportive, low-anxiety environment is essential for promoting active engagement.
Caon (2008) categorizes individual differences into personal factors, socio cultural factors and relational factors.

2.1.2.4 Personal Factors

These intrinsic characteristics include cognitive styles, motivation, personality, learning styles which are common characteristics found in everyone, and "comune a tutti" (Melero Rodriguez et al. 2018:357). That said, Caon points out that although "le neurodiversità, le disabilità e le differenze linguistico-culturali di studenti non madrelingua italiani non sono presenti in tutti gli allievi" and are therefore not common characteristics of all students it is necessary to include them in this category of 'personal factors' (Melero Rodriguez et al 2018:357). In addition, Ferrari (2006) emphasises that educators must consider a renewed focus on language development of all their students. Nowadays, students may have home langauges that are different and therefore bring a wealth of and different language competences to the classroom, "gli studenti di oggi siano sempre più spesso portatori di patrimoni linguistici significativi, dunque di competenze differenziate" and therefore require a renewed view of language development and "una rinnovata attenzione allo sviluppo linguistico di tutti i loro studenti"-, regardless of whether it is their first or second language (Ferrari, 2016, in Caon, 2016:169)
-Cognitive styles and learning strategies
Cognitive styles are normally considered "individual's preferred and habitual modes of perceiving, remembering, organizing, processing, and representing information" (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:12) Learner's process and retain information differently. Some thrive in structured, rule-based learning, while others excel in holistic, experiential environments. (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:12) Caon (2016) underscores the importance of cognitive processes in individual differences (IDs) and their direct connection to strategy use, emphasizing that "L'uso di una strategia implica il tentativo, più o meno consapevolmente controllato, di adattare i processi cognitivi alle esigenze di un compito, in vista di un obiettivo da raggiungere." (Boscolo, 1997 in Caon, 2016:85). This suggests that strategy selection is not random, but rather a deliberate process in which learners modify their cognitive functions to meet specific task demands and achieve their learning goals.
Students with dyslexia (DYSL) or specific language impairments (SLI) face distinct challenges in language processing and retention. Neurodiversity and learning disabilities "sono un fattore sì personale, ma non comune a tutti." (Melero Rodriguez et al 2018:357) The MAC advocates for adaptive, scaffolded instruction that responds to these learners' needs rather than forcing them into standardized learning models. (Melero Rodriguez et al 2018:357)

Metacognitive awareness allows learners to not only recognize their cognitive preferences but also refine and regulate their learning approaches accordingly. Mariani and Pozzo (2002) emphasize that metacognition impacts not just 'knowing' and 'doing' but also 'being' and 'knowing how to learn'. That is, "non interviene solo sugli aspetti di "sapere" e di "saper fare" ma anche su quelli più trascurati del "saper essere" e del "saper apprendere", attraverso lo sviluppo di consapevolezza per quello che si sta facendo" (Mariani, Pozzo, 2002 in Caon, 2016:86). Their perspective highlights that learners who develop metacognitive control can actively shape their strategic choices, leading to greater flexibility in learning. In the MAC, this ability to self-regulate is particularly important, as students with diverse cognitive styles must learn how to adapt and personalize strategies to fit their learning needs.

2.1.2.5 Socio-Cultural Factors

Sociocultural differences shape how learners engage with language learning in the MAC, as language acquisition is not only a cognitive process but also a social and cultural one. Vygotsky's (1934) sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs through interaction with others, where cultural tools, shared meanings, and social structures influence development, making peer collaboration and scaffolded support essential. As Ferrari (2016) notes,

"Il concetto di interlingua si pone proprio come bussola per l'insegnante che, come un navigante, si muove nel mare plurilingue della propria classe, creando percorsi di apprendimento in grado di tenere insieme in modo costruttivo le differenze che emergono e di rispondere in modo comune, ma allo stesso tempo differenziato, ai bisogni di ciascuno" (cited in Caon 2016:170).

This metaphor of the teacher as a navigator emphasises the need for educators to create pathways that accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds. This perspective highlights the importance of creating and fostering inclusive, interactive learning environments where students can support one another.

Furthermore, cultural background influences learners' expectations, attitudes, and preferred learning styles. Educational systems, shaped by cultural norms, instill specific approaches to learning. Griffiths and Soruç (2021:343) point out that "learners from educational systems that emphasize rote memorization may underutilize critical thinking strategies, relying instead on repetition-based learning". This highlights how deeply ingrained cultural learning styles can affect classroom engagement and adaptation to new educational settings. Effective instruction in the MAC must acknowledge these cultural differences and provide diverse learning approaches to support all learners, ensuring an inclusive and responsive learning environment.

-Linguistic Diversity and Interlingua

In many mixed-ability classes, linguistic diversity is an integral component of the learning environment. The presence of bilingual and multilingual students enhances the classroom's linguistic and cultural wealth, offering a unique opportunity for inclusive and dynamic teaching strategies. As Ferrari (2016) describes:

"La presenza diffusa di studenti bilingui nelle scuole ha arricchito il patrimonio linguistico delle classi, luoghi dove si mettono in relazione lingue, parole e accenti differenti." (cited in Caon, 2016:169)

Rather than viewing multilingualism as a challenge that necessitates separate instructional materials, a holistic classroom approach that integrates and values diverse linguistic competencies is advocated:

“Non si tratta tanto di fermarsi a considerare la classe come un insieme di studenti che parlano tante lingue diverse e dunque necessitano di materiali didattici a priori diversi, ma piuttosto di aprirsi alla visione del gruppo classe come unità organica e di conseguenza promuovere modalità di valutazione e di insegnamento che permettono di rendere patrimonio comune le singole competenze di ciascuno.” (Caon. 2016:170)

Caon (2016:170), as mentioned above, describes the teacher’s role as that of a navigator, creating structured learning pathways that acknowledge and build upon linguistic differences while fostering both individualized and collective progress:

“Il concetto di interlingua si pone proprio come bussola per l’insegnante che, come un navigante, si muove nel mare plurilingue della propria classe, creando percorsi di apprendimento in grado di tenere insieme in modo costruttivo le differenze che emergono e di rispondere in modo comune, ma allo stesso tempo differenziato, ai bisogni di ciascuno.”

An inclusive learning environment does not just acknowledge differences but actively integrates them: "Non basta riconoscere e conservare le diversità preesistenti, nella loro pura e semplice autonomia. Bisogna sostenere attivamente la loro interazione e la loro integrazione attraverso la conoscenza della nostra e delle altre culture." (Ferrari, 2016, in Caon, 2016:169)

2.1.2.6 Relational Factors

In the mixed-ability class (MAC), students exhibit individual differences (IDs) in learning styles, cognitive abilities, and linguistic proficiency. However, these differences are not static traits but rather socially interdependent and malleable states developing over time (Murphy, Falout, 2013, in Dörnyei,Ryan, 2015:6). This perspective highlights the relational nature of learning, suggesting that peer interactions shape the development of learners' skills and autonomy.

Peer learning plays a fundamental role in accommodating individual differences by fostering collaboration, mutual support, and social mediation. As Caon (2016) explains, when discussing individual differences, it is crucial to recognize that learners do not develop in isolation; rather, they interact with their peers in ways that can lead to confrontation, opposition, or, ideally, constructive negotiation and mediation:

“Dunque quando si parla di differenze individuali ci si deve riferire a individui che, dovendo necessariamente interagire tra loro, sviluppano dinamiche di confronto, di contrapposizione, o, in una prospettiva più positiva, di mediazione e negoziazione.” (Caon, 2016:123)

One of the key benefits of peer learning in the MAC is its ability to support linguistic development and learner autonomy. Rather than relying solely on vertical correction (teacher-student interaction), students can actively engage in horizontal peer correction, which enhances their ability to self-assess and reflect on their learning:

“La correzione dell’errore può non essere solamente un compito esclusivo del docente e avvenire solo nella modalità di interazione verticale tra insegnante e studenti, ma può coinvolgere gli stessi discenti, a cui si chiede di collaborare attivamente nella modalità di interazione orizzontale tra pari al fine di facilitare lo sviluppo di una sempre maggiore autonomia nell’autovalutazione.” (Caon, 2016:123)

Peer interaction is particularly effective in the MAC when aligned with Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory posits that learners achieve higher levels of competence through social interaction and scaffolding provided by more capable peers or teachers. Caon (2016) further reinforces this idea, emphasizing the role of peer tutoring and cooperative learning in supporting student progress within their ZPD:

"L'apprendimento all'interno della ZPD avviene grazie all'intersoggettività, e ciò rimanda alle funzioni di scaffolding (sostegno) e di tutoring (tutorato) che possono essere svolte dal docente, ma anche dagli stessi compagni impegnati a supportare e sostenere l'apprendimento degli altri in attività didattiche organizzate per coppie o piccoli gruppi." (Caon, 2016:10)

2.1.2.7 Griffiths and Soruç's Categories of IDs

As can be seen so far, Individual differences (IDs) play a crucial role in shaping language learning experiences and outcomes. Griffiths and Soruç (2021:340-45) categorize IDs into eleven key factors, each influencing learners in unique ways. These factors, ranging from age and gender to motivation and learning strategies, highlight the complex and dynamic nature of language acquisition. Understanding these IDs provides valuable insights into how learners approach language learning and what factors contribute to their success.

Griffiths and Soruç (2021:340-25) identify the following 11 IDs:

1. Age – While the Critical Period Hypothesis suggests that younger learners have an advantage, research shows that adults can also be successful language learners depending on factors such as motivation and learning strategies. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:341)
2. Gender – Although some studies suggest that women may have an advantage in language learning due to neurological and social factors, research also indicates that motivated individuals, regardless of gender, can succeed equally. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:341)
3. Race/Nationality/Ethnicity/Culture – These factors influence language learning through socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and attitudes, often affecting motivation and exposure to language learning opportunities. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:342)
4. Aptitude – Traditionally considered a stable, inherent trait, aptitude is associated with language learning speed and has been measured through tests like the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT). However, newer research suggests that aptitude may be dynamic and developable over time. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:342)
5. Personality – Traits like introversion/extroversion, willingness to communicate, and ego permeability can impact language learning. Extroverts are often assumed to be more successful, but research suggests no definitive correlation between personality type and proficiency. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:342)
6. Learning Style – Learners have different preferred ways of processing information, such as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or analytical approaches. Good language learners tend to be flexible and can adapt their learning style to the task at hand. (Griffiths, Soruç 2021:343)
7. Strategies – Closely linked to learning style, strategies refer to conscious actions taken by learners to facilitate learning. Different strategies work better for different individuals, and effective learners adjust their strategies based on context and task demands. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:343)
8. Autonomy – The ability to self-direct learning and regulate one's own progress is a key factor in successful language learning. Autonomous learners are better at setting goals, monitoring progress, and reflecting on their learning. (Griffiths, Soruç,2021:344)
9. Beliefs – Learners' beliefs about language learning (e.g., "I have no aptitude for languages") can significantly impact motivation and performance. Flexible and adaptive beliefs are associated with more effective learning behaviours. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:344)
10. Affect/Emotion – Psychological factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and attitude influence language learning. Positive emotions facilitate learning, while high levels of anxiety can be a barrier. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:344)

11. Motivation – Perhaps the most crucial factor in language learning, motivation determines how much effort a learner invests in acquiring a language. Research shows that motivation is dynamic and can change over time, influenced by personal goals, social context, and learning experiences. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:344-45)

The eleven categories of individual differences identified by Griffiths and Soruç (2021) highlight the multifaceted nature of language learning. While some IDs, such as aptitude and personality, may be considered inherent traits, others, like motivation and learning strategies, can be cultivated to enhance language proficiency. Recognizing and addressing these individual differences can lead to more effective and personalized language learning approaches, ultimately supporting learners in achieving their language acquisition goals. (Griffiths, Soruç, 2021:340-25)

2.1.2.8 Other dimensions in IDs

Caon (2016:15) further distinguishes IDs into two dimensions:

1. Vertical distinctions – Differences in language aptitude, which may influence linguistic proficiency and processing speed.
2. Horizontal distinctions – Unique learner profiles without establishing hierarchical relationships, meaning that differences are not ranked as superior or inferior but rather seen as different strengths.

This categorization reinforces the MAC perspective, where students' individual strengths are leveraged to enhance collaborative learning rather than being used to stratify learners hierarchically.

Additionally, Celentin (2007) highlights the importance of prior knowledge in shaping learners' cognitive engagement: "Il modo in cui creiamo la nostra conoscenza dipende da ciò che conosciamo già." (Celentin, 2007:12 in Caon, 2016:17) This means that effective instruction must build on students' existing and prior knowledge, reinforcing their ability to connect new learning to familiar concepts. Moreover, as Celentin further explains:

"Il soggetto ha un ruolo attivo nella costruzione del proprio sapere." (cited in Caon 2016:17) highlighting the active, constructive role of learners, aligning with socio-constructivist and MAC methodologies, where learning is not passively received but actively built through interaction and reflection, emphasising the importance of the awareness and application of Language Learning Strategies (LLS).

2.2 Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in the Mixed-Ability Class

Since the late 1970s, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been at the forefront of second language acquisition (SLA) research, shifting the focus from teacher-centred methods to learner autonomy. Oxford (2003) notes that LLS enhance students' language proficiency and self-regulation, making learners more independent:

"Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners." (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991in Oxford 2003:9)

However, many learners are unaware of how strategic choices can improve their learning (Oxford, 2003 :9). This highlights the importance of raising awareness and strategy instruction, particularly in the MAC where students have diverse learning preferences and needs.

2.2.1 Defining the role of Language Learning Strategies in language learning and instruction

Different classification systems have attempted to organize individual learning strategies into broader categories. In a comparative study of three major classification frameworks (O'Malley, Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1981), Hsiao and Oxford (2002) concluded that Oxford's (1990) system—comprising six primary strategy types (Metacognitive, Cognitive, Memory, Compensation, Social, and Affective)—was the most effective in encompassing the diverse range of strategies employed by language learners (in Chamot, 2004:17). Oxford (1990:8) provides a widely used definition of LLS, describing them as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations." These strategies serve to foster students' awareness regarding how to take control of their language learning enhance and improve self-regulation and foster deeper engagement with language learning. The importance of strategy awareness and instruction in language learning is also emphasized by Cisotto (2005), who states: "Uno degli obiettivi prioritari dell'istruzione è quello di portare ogni alunno a saper gestire in autonomia il proprio apprendimento" (in Caon, 2016:86).

LLS are not merely techniques for efficient learning; they are integral to fostering self-regulation and problem-solving skills in learners. O'Malley and Chamot (1990:8) emphasize that "metacognitive strategies help students become self-regulated learners, equipped to manage their learning autonomously". Similarly, Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (in Oxford, 2003:12). The general knowledge that using strategies to enhance learning is not new. Past generations of students and learners have used memory strategies, such as flash-cards, to remember information or other general learning strategies, such as summarising or highlighting important information. These strategies, which seem quite basic may be taken for granted by learners but "it must be remembered that the strategies themselves had to be learnt initially before they could be used to enhance learning, and some students never manage to acquire this procedural knowledge" (Griffiths, 2013:38). Being actively and strategically involved in the language learning process and using language learning strategies (LLS) is seen as a main factor in successful language learning (Griffiths, 2013:39) In order to become better language learners, learners must be engaged actively in the learning process and become more responsible in managing their own learning and using language learning strategies. "Yet students are not always aware of the power of consciously using LLS for making learning quicker and more effective" (Oxford, 2003:9) suggesting that strategy instruction is an important tool to foster awareness and encourage self regulation and autonomy.

These findings highlight the importance of explicit strategy instruction, particularly for learners in the MAC, where differentiated instruction is essential for catering to diverse learning needs.

2.2.2 Oxford's (2003) taxonomy of LLS

Oxford (2003) categorizes LLS into six broad types:

1. Cognitive strategies –Direct manipulation of language through note-taking, summarizing, or analysing structures.
2. Metacognitive strategies – Planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning process.
3. Memory-related strategies – Use of mnemonics, visual imagery, and associations.
4. Compensatory strategies – Guessing meaning from context, using synonyms or gestures.
5. Affective strategies – Managing emotions and motivation through self-encouragement.
6. Social strategies – Learning through interaction, asking questions, and seeking help.

These classifications highlighting the diversity of strategies available to learners, reinforcing the need for explicit instruction and reflection to help students identify the strategies that best align with their individual learning styles and needs.

2.2.3 O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) taxonomy of LLS

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed a three-category taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies (LLS), distinguishing strategies based on cognitive processes and learner control over learning. Within Anderson's (1983) framework which considers language strategies as cognitive processes, therefore "strategies can be represented the same way as any other complex skill". (O'Malley, Chamot 1990 :43). Strategies are categorised according to the type or level of processing involved.

Their framework includes:

1. Metacognitive Strategies
   These involve higher-order thinking processes that help learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. Examples include:
   Planning: Setting goals and organizing study time
   Monitoring: Checking comprehension while listening or reading
   Evaluating: Assessing progress and adjusting strategies accordingly
2. Cognitive Strategies
   These refer to direct manipulation of language material to enhance understanding and retention. Examples include:
   Rehearsal: Repeating words/phrases to remember them
   Elaboration: Relating new knowledge to existing knowledge
   Summarization: Condensing key points from texts
   Inferencing: Using context clues to guess meanings
   Note-taking: Recording important information
3. Social/Affective Strategies
   These strategies focus on interacting with others and managing emotions during learning. Examples include:
   Cooperation: Working with peers to practice language
   Questioning for clarification: Asking for explanations or feedback
   Self-talk: Encouraging oneself to reduce anxiety and build confidence
   (O'Malley, Chamot 1990 :43-45)

The key distinction between O'Malley & Chamot's (1990) three-category model and Oxford's (1990) six-category system lies in their level of specificity and conceptual approach to language learning strategies. While both frameworks acknowledge the importance of cognitive processes, self-regulation, and social interaction, they differ in how they classify and emphasize various strategies.
O'Malley and Chamot(1990) provide a broader, more streamlined categorization, focusing on three overarching groups: Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Social/Affective strategies. This model aligns closely with cognitive psychology, treating language learning as a process of acquiring, managing, and applying knowledge. However, it does not explicitly distinguish memory-related techniques or strategies used to compensate for linguistic gaps, instead incorporating them under general cognitive functions.
In contrast, Oxford's (1990) model expands the classification into six categories, offering a more detailed and learner-centred approach. By separating memory and compensation strategies, she recognizes their distinct role in language acquisition—memory strategies help learners encode and retrieve information efficiently, while compensation strategies enable them to navigate communication challenges when linguistic knowledge is lacking. Additionally, Oxford divides social and affective strategies, highlighting the distinction between strategies that involve interaction with others and those that regulate emotions and motivation in language learning.

2.2.4 The Role of LLS in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC)

In MAC, strategy instruction must be differentiated to match learners' cognitive styles, levels, and needs. Caon (2016:116) emphasizes that "la continua costruzione di pratiche didattiche flessibili, basate anche sui diversi stili cognitivi, diventa la prerogativa per rispondere alle molteplici esigenze del gruppo, per valorizzare le diversità dei singoli studenti e, soprattutto, per riuscire a portare in classe un modello di insegnamento/apprendimento che stimoli lo studente alla costante ricerca di nuove strategie e ad un maggiore senso di inclusione ed appartenenza." This perspective highlights that in the MAC, LLS should not be viewed as one-size-fits-all solutions but as tools that enable personalized learning experiences.
Among all strategies, metacognitive strategies are particularly relevant in the MAC, as they foster self-regulation and active participation while managing the overall learning process (Oxford 2003:12). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), these strategies ensure that learners:

- Plan their learning (goal setting, resource allocation).
- Monitor comprehension (self-checks, strategy adjustments).
- Evaluate progress and success (self-assessment, peer feedback).

Thus, embedding metacognitive strategy instruction into the MAC helps students navigate their learning process more effectively. Research by Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (in Oxford 2003:12). This indicates that strong metacognitive awareness enhances students' ability to use other strategies effectively, reinforcing the importance of strategy awareness training in language instruction. The statement highlights that metacognitive strategies are essential for optimizing cognitive strategies—they help learners

strategically manage how they process information, leading to more effective learning and task completion.
Integrating LLS into the language classroom can fosters learner independence, motivation, and adaptability, key factors for inclusive and differentiated instruction.

2.2.5 Individual Differences and Their Relationship to Language Learning Strategies

The relationship between Individual Differences (IDs) and Language Learning Strategies (LLS) is fundamental to second language acquisition (SLA). As Oxford (1990) defines, "LLS are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations." However, learners' strategy use is not uniform; it is influenced by cognitive, affective, and sociocultural differences amongst other variables such as culture and gender. (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:151) Understanding how these differences impact LLS selection and effectiveness is crucial, particularly in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), where student diversity is a defining feature.
Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:1) argue that "understanding learner variations is an essential part of the study of second language acquisition (SLA) in general". These individual variations—spanning aptitude, motivation, personality, and other cognitive and social factors—shape how learners engage with different strategies.(Macaro in Chamot, Harris, 2019:70) Similarly, Li, Hiver et al. (2022:4) emphasize that "the significance of ID factors lies in their predictive power on learning outcomes, their explanatory functions in the mechanisms of L2 learning, and their implications for the practice of language teaching and learning". This highlights why a deep exploration of IDs and LLS is necessary for fostering inclusive and effective learning environments.

2.2.5.1 Cognitive Factors and LLS

Language aptitude has long been considered a predictor of LLS use and effectiveness. Skehan (1994) describes aptitude as "a specific talent for language learning, independent of abilities in other fields and relatively stable in its operation, that is, relatively non-teachable" (Caon, 2016:21). High-aptitude learners typically engage in cognitive and metacognitive strategies more effectively, using strategies such as rule deduction, pattern recognition, and analytical reasoning to facilitate language learning. (Macaro in Chamot,Harris, 2019:70) In contrast, learners with lower aptitude may need explicit instruction and structured support to compensate for difficulties in acquiring grammatical rules and vocabulary.
Working memory capacity further impacts language learning and LLS use. Li, Hiver et al. (2022:5) state that "working memory capacity significantly impacts second language proficiency, particularly in tasks requiring complex sentence processing, listening comprehension, and real-time speech production". Learners with higher working memory can efficiently manage cognitive load, making them more likely to use metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring, planning, and self-evaluation. Conversely, learners with lower working memory capacity often struggle with real-time processing and may rely more on rote learning and rehearsal strategies.

2.2.5.2 Aptitude

The term 'aptitude' refers to a "specific talent for language learning, independent of abilities in other fields and relatively stable in its operation, that is, relatively non-teachable" ("un talento specifico per l'apprendimento delle lingue, indipendente dalle capacità in altri campi e piuttosto stabile nel suo operare, cioè relativamente non insegnabile" (Skehan, 1994 in Caon,2016:21). According to Skehan (1986, 1989), language aptitude is influenced by both innate and educational factors, with the family environment playing a significant role. Skehan (1994) identifies several components of aptitude: "phonetic coding ability, language analysis ability, and memory" ("abilità di codificazione fonetica, abilità di analisi linguistica, memoria", (in Caon 2016 :21). These components correspond to different stages in language processing: input, processing, and recall.

Mariani and Pozzo (2002) argue that these components vary among individuals, preferring to speak of "aptitudes that each person carries at different levels" ("attitudini di cui ciascuno è portatore a livelli differenti"(cited in Caon 2016:22). This variation exists not only between different students but also within the same student. They state, "one is not generically 'good' at languages; rather, each person has relative strengths and weaknesses" ("non si è genericamente "bravi" nelle lingue: piuttosto, ognuno possiede punti di relativa forza e punti di relativa debolezza") (in Caon 2016:22). This nuanced view aligns closely with Caon's (2016) perspective of the MAC where individual differences are seen as opportunities for enriching the learning environment. In addition, Balboni (2007) suggests that aptitude results from the interaction of several factors: neuro (hemispheric dominance), psycho (multiple intelligences, learning styles, personality traits), and socio-cultural (educational and relational models). (in Caon 2016:22)

2.2.5.3 Addressing Variability in Aptitude in the MAC

In the MAC, where learners exhibit diverse aptitude profiles, differentiation is essential. Caon (2008) highlights the importance of leveraging variability as a resource for mutual enrichment. For instance:

- High-Aptitude Learners: Advanced tasks like analysing literary texts, engaging in debates, or exploring etymological origins of words challenge these students and encourage higher-order thinking skills.
- Learners with Lower Aptitude: Scaffolding techniques, such as breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps or using visual aids and hands-on activities, help these learners engage meaningfully with content. Mariani and Pozzo (2002) stress that task design should consider "relative strengths and weaknesses" to promote equitable learning outcomes. Mariani and Pozzo (2002) emphasize that designing tasks to align with learners' analytical strengths ensures a balance between challenge and support, fostering both competence and confidence (in Caon, 2016:22)

Balboni's (2007) development of a 'self-assessment sheet' for learners highlights the role of metacognitive awareness in understanding and improving aptitude, fostering a sense of agency among students. (in Caon, 2016:22). Balboni's (2007) approach to metacognitive awareness is particularly relevant in supporting diverse aptitudes. By encouraging learners to reflect on their strengths and areas for growth, teachers can foster a culture of self-awareness and improvement. The learner "può osservare e agire, ovviamente con il supporto del docente, sulle proprie caratteristiche laddove si riscontrino 'relative debolezze', con l'obiettivo di migliorare la propria attitudine attraverso un'azione metacognitiva." (Caon, 2016:22)

These tools empower students to take ownership of their learning processes, enhancing both their aptitude and their confidence. As Caon (2016:25) observes, creating a non-judgmental environment where students feel safe to explore their abilities enriches the classroom dynamic and promotes collective learning, and is characterised by freedom of expression and exchange of opinions, "caratterizzata dalla libera espressione e dallo scambio di diversi punti di vista"

2.2.5.4 Personality Traits and Strategy Preferences

Personality traits are central to how learners interact with strategies, shaping their preferences and engagement. Dewaele & Furnham (1999:31) observe that extroverts are more inclined to use social strategies, such as engaging in conversations, participating in discussions, and seeking clarification from peers and teachers". Extroverted students thrive in communicative, social learning environments. They gravitate toward strategies like group planning, peer feedback, and collaborative problem-solving, where interaction enhances their understanding. As Balboni (2006) observes, "le personalità estroverse sono avvantaggiate dall'approccio comunicativo…" in (Caon 2016:16). Wakamoto (2009) corroborates this, noting that "extroverts showed preference for more social forms of learning" (in Dörnyei, Ryan 2015:31). In contrast, introverted learners excel in solitary and reflective tasks, favouring strategies like self-monitoring, journaling, and independent goal setting. These tasks allow them to process information deeply and methodically, free from the pressure of immediate social interaction. As Balboni (2006) explains, introverted learners are better suited to activities that prioritize independent thinking and introspection (Caon, 2016:16). Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:31) highlight this dichotomy, concluding that "extroverts and introverts may favour different learning styles and adopt different learning strategies"
Ultimately, "we should not think of L2 learning as a monolithic process but rather as a series of diverse tasks and processes, some of which may suit extroverts, while others may favour introverts." (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:31).

2.2.5.4.1 Extroverted Learners and Introverted Learners: Strategies and Activities

For extroverts, "who show preference for more social forms of learning" collaborative tasks like group discussions, project-based learning, and peer-assisted interactions enhance engagement. Social strategies, like cooperative learning and peer feedback, align closely with extroverts' preferences. (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015:31).
Cognitive strategies, such as summarizing and note-taking, are particularly effective for introverted learners who prefer structured and independent tasks. Balboni (2006) emphasizes the importance of activities that prioritize introspection, stating that introverted learners excel in environments that support independent thought and self-directed learning. (Caon, 2016:16)
Additionally, introverted learners benefit from scaffolding that allows them to build confidence in low-pressure settings. For example, guided reflection prompts, and self-paced activities ensure that introverts can engage meaningfully without feeling overwhelmed by immediate social demands. This aligns with Caon's (2016) emphasis on creating environments where learners can thrive based on their unique profiles.

2.2.5.5 Balancing Strategies in the MAC

To address the needs of both extroverted and introverted learners within the MAC, educators should design activities that balance collaboration and reflection.

Combining social strategies for extroverts with metacognitive strategies for introverts creates a comprehensive approach to engagement. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015:31) state, "Different personality traits require different pedagogical approaches to ensure that all learners feel valued and supported". By embedding these strategies into the MAC framework, educators can transform diversity into a strength, fostering collective growth and individual success.

2.2.6 Affective factors: Motivation and Emotional Factors in Strategy Use

2.2.6.1 Motivation

Motivation is a critical driver of language learning, described by Titone as "dinamogenetico" (dynamogenic) (Titone, 1976, 1987, 1993; Freddi, 1987, 1994; Balboni, 1994, 2002; Cardona, 2001; Caon, 2006 in Caon, 2016:18), meaning that motivation generates or stimulates energy and acts as a dynamic force. Rheinberg (1997) conceptualizes motivation as a "collective category" encompassing various processes and phenomena (Caon, 2016:18). Motivation is traditionally divided into intrinsic (self-driven) and extrinsic (externally driven), as well as instrumental and integrative.

The intrinsic/extrinsic motivation distinction is particularly significant. Intrinsic motivation arises when students find personal interest, need, desire, curiosity, and pleasure in learning autonomously. This type of motivation is more sustainable and fosters deeper learning. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors like teacher rewards and reinforcement: "le ragioni che stanno alla base dell'apprendimento non sono dovute a fattori personali, autodiretti, ma hanno stretti legami con fattori esterni" (Caon, 2106:18). Cardona (2001) points out that extrinsic motivation can lead to dependence on the teacher and the type of reinforcement received, hindering personal cognitive and metacognitive strategy development: "corre il rischio di creare una dipendenza molto forte… dipendere le sue scelte dal tipo di rinforzo che riceve dall'insegnante" (in Caon 2016:19).

Motivation is a key driver of strategy use, influencing learners' willingness to engage with tasks and persist in the face of challenges. Dörnyei (2005:7) highlights that motivation provides one of "principal learner variables," which must be closely examined when "addressing individual differences from an educational perspective." Motivated learners are more likely to adopt strategies like progress tracking, goal-setting, and self-monitoring, as these require sustained effort and self-discipline.

2.2.6.2 Emotional Dimensions

Emotions play a pivotal role in learning. Positive emotions boost serotonin levels, enhancing memory and self-esteem, while stress and negative emotions can impair cognitive functions and hinder retention (Caon, 2016:12). Schumann's Neurobiology of Affect in Language (1997) supports this, stating that cognitive processes are always accompanied by emotional processes, and pleasant emotions are crucial for stable and lasting information acquisition and articulated by Caon(2016:12)"l'emozione piacevole gioca un ruolo fondamentale per l'attivazione di processi cognitivi che permettono l'acquisizione stabile e duratura delle informazioni"

Caon (2008) emphasizes the importance of pleasure in learning as a dimension to prioritize for language acquisition: "piacere come dimensione da privilegiare per l'acquisizione linguistica" (Caon 2016:18). Tomlinson (2001:12) concurs and advises educators to "Be sure to balance

rigor and joy in learning. It's difficult to imagine a talented learner persisting when there is little pleasure in what the learner once thought was fascinating"
Anxiety, on the other hand, can inhibit effective LLS use. Krashen's (198:92) Affective Filter Hypothesis- "a hypothesis as to how affective variables relate to the process of second language acquisition" states that "Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom" (Krashen 1982:31) Zhang (2019) highlights that "anxiety has stronger associations with listening than speaking, writing, and reading, suggesting that teachers should make a special effort to reduce learners' anxiety and mitigate the harmful effects of anxiety in listening activities or assessments" (in Li, Hiver et al. 2022:5).

2.2.6.3 Motivation and Emotion, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in the MAC

Motivation directly influences the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS). Learners with high intrinsic motivation are more likely to employ cognitive strategies, such as summarizing, identifying patterns, and using concept maps, as well as metacognitive strategies, including planning and self-monitoring. Dörnyei's (2005:7) assertion, as mentioned previously, highlights that motivation provides one of "principal learner variables," which must be closely examined when "addressing individual differences from an educational perspective." Conversely, learners with low intrinsic motivation or high levels of anxiety may struggle to utilize strategies effectively. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis explains that high stress inhibits language processing, reducing the capacity to employ strategies effectively (Celentin, Luise, 2019:6). Caon (2008) suggests stimulating motivation via contents, methodologies and the teacher -student rapport -"sarebbe importante stimolare la motivazione intrinseca dell'alunno at traverso: i contenuti, le metodologie e la relazione insegnante alunno" (Melero Rodriguez et al 2018:376)
Within the MAC, fostering emotional engagement is critical for sustaining motivation and strategy use. Positive emotional states, such as excitement or hope, improve learners' ability to engage with and retain information. Vettorel (2006) notes that serotonin levels, influenced by emotional states, enhance memory retention and self-esteem. Caon (2008) highlights the importance of activities that generate pleasure: "Il termine 'piacere' è un concetto da intendersi non solo come sensazione o emozione gradevole, ma anche (se non soprattutto) come appagamento di un'esigenza conoscitiva e di un desiderio di partecipazione" (Caon, 2016:19).

2.2.7 Multiple Intelligences and Strategy Use

Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences offers a framework for understanding the diverse cognitive potentials present in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC). His model identifies nine intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, each representing a unique way of processing information. However, as Torresan (2006) notes, "il sistema educativo occidentale tende a favorire esclusivamente, tanto nei contenuti quanto nei processi, la logica e il linguaggio" (cited in Caon, 2016:17), often neglecting other forms of intelligence. This imbalance can alienate students whose strengths lie outside traditional academic domains, such as musical or kinaesthetic intelligences.

2.2.7.1 Linguistic Intelligence

Students with strong verbal reasoning skills benefit from strategies like textual analysis, essay writing, and creating word maps to plan and evaluate their learning. As Haley (2004) emphasizes, providing opportunities for learners to articulate their ideas fosters deeper understanding and engagement. (Caon, 2016:17).

2.2.7.2 Kinaesthetic Intelligence

Learners who excel in physical activities thrive with hands-on strategies like role play, Total Physical Response (TPR), or constructing models to represent concepts. Torresan (2006), from Haley (2004) highlights that kinaesthetic learners benefit from physical engagement such as role plays and hands-on activities (Caon, 2016:17).

2.2.7.3 Interpersonal Intelligence

Collaborative activities such as group brainstorming or peer-assisted planning allow learners with strong interpersonal intelligence to use social interactions to enhance their learning. Social strategies, including cooperative learning and peer feedback, align with these learners' preferences. Caon (2008) highlights the importance of collaborative approaches in the MAC, As Rutka (2006) claims "gli studenti sono motivati a cooperare condividendo responsabilità e impegno e sviluppano e migliorano le relazioni sociali anche in funzione di un livello migliore di apprendimento." (cited in Caon, 2016:73).

2.2.7.4 Intrapersonal Intelligence

Reflective journaling, self-monitoring, and goal setting help learners with intrapersonal intelligence engage deeply with their learning processes. As Torresan (2006) and Haley (2004) emphasize, fostering self-awareness through tailored activities, such as journalling, not only engages intrapersonal learners but also builds their autonomy and resilience. (Caon, 2016:17).

2.2.7.5 Balancing Multiple Intelligences in the MAC

Differentiated instruction rooted in the MAC perspective emphasizes the value of diversity as a resource for collective growth. By integrating awareness of intelligences into teaching strategies, educators can create inclusive classrooms where every student's potential is recognized and nurtured. As Torresan (2006) affirms that instruction for instance in the language classroom must contain "modelli operativi specifici per l'insegnamento delle lingue in cui vi sia attenzione per tutte le formae mentis degli studenti" (in Caon, 2016:17)
To address the diversity of intelligences in the MAC, "una gamma ampia e integrata di attività che permettano non solo di valorizzare tutti gli studenti per quelli che sono i loro 'relativi punti di forza', ma di potenziare le intelligenze di ognuno affinché si riducano progressivamente i 'relativi punti di debolezza" (Caon, 2016:17)

2.3 Enhancing Individual Differences

The MAC perspective emphasizes enhancing differences as a systemic strategy to leverage diversity for mutual growth. Rooted in Caon's (2016) framework, this approach shifts the focus from merely managing heterogeneity to actively designing environments where diverse competencies enrich collective learning. Language learning strategies (LLS) align closely with this perspective, offering practical tools to foster engagement, autonomy, and collaboration (Caon, 2016:17)

2.3.1 Encouraging Peer Collaboration

Peer collaboration, a cornerstone of the enhancing differences framework. Extroverted learners thrive in group tasks like cooperative learning and peer tutoring, where interaction is central to their engagement and understanding. As Caon (2016) notes, "entrambi mirano a creare dinamiche relazionali positive tra gli studenti" (Caon 2016:71). Social and affective strategies, such as cooperative feedback sessions, empower extroverted learners to engage actively and build interpersonal skills.
However, peer collaboration also benefits introverted learners by fostering reflective dialogue within smaller, less intimidating groups. Balboni (2006) explains that introverted learners excel in activities focusing independent thinking and introspection (Caon, 2016:16), but inclusive group dynamics offer these learners meaningful ways to interact without overwhelming them.

2.3.2 Inclusive Dialogue

Communication serves as a bridge between learners of varying abilities, supporting both cognitive and affective engagement. As Celentin (2007) asserts, "il dialogo e la condivisione sono essenziali per l'apprendimento poiché consentono al soggetto di negoziare i significati, di ristrutturarli attivamente e di stabilire delle relazioni che, se positive, comportano l'aumento della partecipazione cognitiva e affettiva" (Caon, 2016:13).

LLS, in particular metacognitive strategies, enhance this further by embedding reflective practices into dialogue. For instance, planning discussion points or using guided questions helps learners set goals for group interactions. Structured peer feedback sessions or digital collaboration tools encourage learners to monitor and adjust their communication strategies, aligning with MAC emphasis on collective growth.

2.4 Metacognitive Strategies for Autonomy

Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, are integral to the enhancing differences framework. Transparent teaching actions—like sharing learning goals and involving learners in reflective practices—help students identify strengths and address areas of improvement. As Balboni (2007) suggests, metacognitive tools like self-assessment sheets empower students to take ownership of their learning (Caon 2016:62)

In the MAC, where learners bring diverse competencies to the classroom, metacognitive strategies ensure that every student can thrive. Extroverted learners might monitor their progress through collaborative feedback, while introverted students benefit from reflective journaling to evaluate their strategies independently. Celentin (2007) reinforces this, stating, "Il soggetto ha un ruolo attivo nella costruzione del proprio sapere" (Caon, 2016:13) emphasizing learners' active roles in shaping their knowledge.

2.5 Diversity Factors in Strategy Implementation

The heterogeneity of the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) magnifies the influence of Individual Differences (IDs) on strategy use, requiring adaptive and inclusive teaching methods. Celentin and Luise (2019:6) describe the MAC as "mosaics" where diverse competencies and backgrounds converge: "Ogni classe rappresenta un mosaico di diversità che si incontrano, si scontrano, si integrano, dando vita ad un gruppo composto da una varietà di competenze". This diversity necessitates tailoring strategies that not only address varied learner needs but also celebrate these differences as a foundation for innovation and growth.
Rutka (2006) eloquently sums it up by claiming:
"Proponendo attività motivanti e sfidanti che richiedano l'uso di intelligenze diverse, fornendo materiali tradizionali e nuovi che facilitino e favoriscano l'apprendimento significativo, educando a comportamenti sociali mirati alla cooperazione efficace, alla conoscenza e all'apprezzamento reciproci, l'insegnate crea le condizioni perché il gruppo cooperativo divenga il mezzo per raggiungere obiettivi sociali, cognitivi e disciplinari superiori a quelli che si potrebbero raggiungere in un contesto di apprendimento individualistico o competitivo" (in Caon, 2016:73)

2.6 Acknowledging Personal Beliefs and Opinions

Cultural norms and personal attitudes influence how learners engage with strategies, making open dialogue crucial. Encouraging students to reflect on and share their perspectives fosters a richer classroom dynamic while helping them develop metacognitive awareness. (Celentin, Luise, 2019: 7). Social and affective strategies enable learners to navigate diverse viewpoints while building empathy and collaboration.
As Caon (2008) emphasizes, addressing diversity factors allows educators to transform challenges into opportunities for innovation, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment (Caon, 2016:22)
By tailoring strategies to align with cognitive styles, experiential backgrounds, and personal beliefs, teachers create classrooms that celebrate the mosaic of diversity described by Celentin and Luise (2019) and transform the MAC into collaborative ecosystems where diversity is not a barrier but a resource. As highlighted throughout this chapter, embracing the variability within classrooms fosters both individual and collective growth.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the essential role of Individual Differences (IDs) in shaping Language Learning Strategies (LLS) within the Mixed-Ability Class. By examining cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural factors, it has been demonstrated that students' unique learning profiles influence not only their language learning trajectories but also their choice of and ability to adopt and apply different strategies. Rather than viewing learner diversity as a challenge, the MAC perspective, as highlighted by Caon (2016), positions variation among students as an opportunity for more inclusive, adaptive instruction that maximizes engagement and learning outcomes.

A key outcome of this discussion is the role of language learning strategy instruction (LLSI), particularly in the MAC, where differentiation plays a central role in ensuring equitable learning experiences. Research by Oxford (2003), Dörnyei (2005), and Purpura (1999) suggests that metacognitive strategy awareness and training have a direct impact on learners' ability to regulate their learning, increase motivation, and manage challenges. Teachers, therefore, play a critical role in guiding students toward recognizing and applying effective strategies based on their individual learning profiles.

Beyond a theoretical discussion, this chapter has also laid the foundation for an empirical investigation into how pre-service and in-service primary school teachers perceive and apply LLS in their own learning and instructional practices. The questionnaire developed for this study serves as a tool to explore two key areas:

1. Teachers' Personal Use of LLS: The first section of the questionnaire examines how teachers, as language learners, utilize cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies. Understanding their own strategy use provides insight into their level of strategy awareness and self-regulated learning habits.
2. Teachers' Application of LLS in the Classroom: The second part presents scenario-based questions to assess whether teachers recognize the role of IDs in strategy selection and how they might adapt LLS instruction to suit diverse student needs in the MAC. This will provide a practical perspective on whether teachers are equipped to scaffold and differentiate learning strategies in their future classrooms.

The findings from this questionnaire will be instrumental in identifying gaps in teacher preparation and determining whether there is a need for more explicit metacognitive strategy training and awareness. As metacognitive strategy instruction is an essential element in fostering learner autonomy and success in a perspective of the MAC, Chapter 3 will build upon these discussions by exploring how metacognitive strategies can be taught and integrated into primary school instruction. The transition from theoretical understanding to practical application will offer deeper insights into how teachers can develop a pedagogical approach that both supports individual differences and enhances strategic competence among young learners.

The discussion now transitions to Chapter 3, which centres on metacognitive strategy instruction—an essential component of empowering learners in the MAC. This chapter will examine how metacognitive awareness can be explicitly taught, promoting deeper engagement with language learning strategies and strengthening teachers' ability to scaffold strategic learning in the foreign language classroom, particularly when teaching young children English.

3 METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING – A FOCUS ON YOUNG LEARNERS

3.1 Introduction

Metacognition refers to "the knowledge about and regulation of one's cognitive activities in learning processes" (Veenman et al. 2006:3). That is, thinking about thinking. It encompasses both metacognitive knowledge—awareness of one's cognitive strengths, weaknesses, and effective learning strategies—and metacognitive regulation, which involves actively planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning progress (Flavell 1979:907-909).
Metacognitive strategies are the practical applications of metacognition that help learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. These strategies guide students in setting goals, assessing comprehension, and adjusting learning approaches based on effectiveness (Oxford, 1990, 2016; O'Malley, Chamot, 1990). Unlike cognitive strategies, which focus on direct language tasks (e.g., memorizing vocabulary), metacognitive strategies focus on how learning occurs. "Cognitive strategies are invoked to make cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to monitor it." (Flavell, 1979:909) For example, a learner might plan study sessions strategically, monitor comprehension while reading, or reflect on the success of a listening practice technique.

3.1.1 What are metacognitive strategies?

A clear understanding of metacognitive strategies and their role in learning is essential for effective instruction. Metacognitive strategies are commonly categorized into three main types:

- Planning strategies, which involve "making a plan or deciding how much time to spend on an activity"
- Monitoring strategies, used to "check understanding and learning during a task, for example through self-testing and questioning"
- Evaluation strategies, which allow learners to "analyse performance" and reflect on the effectiveness of their learning approaches (Schraw,Dennison 1994 in Muijs,Bokhove, 2020:26).

Despite its significance in foreign language acquisition, metacognition remains a broad and evolving field with varying definitions. "The most common distinction in metacognition separates metacognitive knowledge from skills" (Veenman et al. 2006:4). That is, the distinction between declarative knowledge (knowing about strategies) and procedural knowledge (effectively applying them), while others debate whether metacognition is a subset of self-regulation or a broader construct that includes motivation and social-emotional factors (Zimmerman, 2000).
Research in second and foreign language teaching, learning and acquisition has emphasized that metacognitive strategies are essential for developing learner autonomy and improving

linguistic outcomes (Oxford, 1990, 2016; O'Malley, Chamot,1990). These strategies are particularly crucial for young language learners, who often require explicit instruction and scaffolding to develop self-regulation skills (Vygotsky, 1978; Ellis,Ibrahim, 2019).

3.1.2 But Why, When and How for Young Children? - Early Development of Metacognition in Young Children

For many years, researchers believed that metacognition—the ability to reflect on and regulate one's own thinking—did not develop until around ages 7 or 8, or even later. Flavell (1979) and Veenman et al. (2006) suggest that metacognitive development occurs gradually, stating that: "Metacognitive skills emerge at the age of 8 to 10 years, and expand during the years thereafter (Berk, 2003; Veenman and Spaans, 2005; Veenman et al., 2004). Moreover, certain metacognitive skills, such as monitoring and evaluation, appear to mature later on than others (e.g., planning)." (cited in Veenman et al. 2006:8)

Similarly, Flavell (1979:906) noted that younger children have limited metacognitive awareness, explaining that: "Young children are quite limited in their knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena, or in their metacognition, and do relatively little monitoring of their own memory, comprehension, and other cognitive enterprises".

However, some researchers acknowledged that these findings might have been influenced by children's limited experiences, training, or instruction, rather than an inherent absence of metacognitive ability. Flavell (1979:910), for example, speculated that metacognitive skills could be nurtured through appropriate interventions, stating that: "Increasing the quantity and quality of children's metacognitive knowledge and monitoring skills through systematic training may be feasible as well as desirable." Despite such insights, the dominant perspective for many years remained one of deficit, assuming that young children were simply not capable of metacognition.

Other research has challenged this perspective, suggesting that young children exhibit metacognitive skills much earlier than previously thought. Whitebread et al (2009:50) argue that even very young children (below 6 years of age) may reveal elementary executive functions that are closely related to metacognition, and this can be achieved through "the involvement of play in supporting the development of metacognitive and self-regulatory skills, including representational abilities, which are particularly significant in intentional learning." Further research suggests that "young children are capable of rudimentary forms of metacognitive thought, particularly after the age of 3. Although individual developmental models vary, most postulate massive improvements in metacognition during the first 6 years of life." (Lai, 2011:2)

One of the most significant studies to provide empirical evidence of early metacognitive ability was conducted by Whitebread and colleagues (2007). Observing 1,440 preschool-aged children over two years in classroom settings, the researchers documented numerous instances of metacognitive behaviours in 3- to 5-year-olds. These behaviours were most frequently observed when children initiated their own learning activities, worked in small groups or pairs, and engaged in collaborative discussions. The study highlighted the importance of assessing metacognition in naturalistic settings, as traditional assessment methods that relied heavily on verbal self-reporting may have failed to capture young children's metacognitive skills. (Whitebread, Basilio, 2012:20)

Similarly, Shamir et al. (2009) provide compelling evidence for early metacognitive development through their study of 64 children aged 4 to 5 from kindergartens. In a memory recall task, children were first asked to remember a series of nine pictures individually and then explain their recall strategies through self-report. They later participated in a peer-assisted learning (PAL) situation, where they helped a peer recall the pictures. Researchers analysed both verbal and non-verbal behaviours, as well as the children's language abilities. (Shamir et al. 2009)

The findings revealed that procedural metacognitive knowledge—the ability to apply strategies—was more developed than declarative metacognitive knowledge, which involves explicitly stating what one knows about cognition. Procedural metacognitive knowledge was particularly pronounced in the peer-assisted setting, where children demonstrated greater metacognitive engagement. Notably, procedural metacognitive knowledge and participation in PAL were the strongest predictors of cognitive performance, even when controlling for language ability and individual recall strategies. (Shamir et al. 2009:56)

These results suggest that collaboration with peers enhances young children's ability to regulate their own thinking and learning processes, reinforcing the importance of social interaction in metacognitive development. As Shamir et al. (2009) conclude that the findings: “are in line with other recent research employing naturalistic observations indicating early meta-cognitive competencies.” (Shamir et al. 2009:57)

Taken together, these studies indicate that previous assumptions about the late emergence of metacognition were likely a result of methodological limitations rather than an actual absence of ability in young children, suggesting: “One explanation for these inconsistencies in the findings rests on the methodologies used to assess metacognition in the different studies.” (Shamir et al. 2009: 48)

However, as can be seen, Whitebread et al. (2007) and Shamir et al. (2009) provide strong evidence that children as young as three can demonstrate metacognitive awareness and strategy use, particularly when assessments take place in meaningful, interactive contexts.

Ultimately, these findings challenge the long-standing view that metacognition only develops in middle childhood. Instead, they suggest that even very young children can think about and regulate their learning, particularly when they are engaged in collaborative, real-world learning experiences. Recognizing this earlier emergence of metacognition has important implications for early childhood education, emphasizing the need to support and nurture these skills from a much younger age.

A clear understanding of how metacognition develops and what children at different ages can achieve is crucial for designing effective teaching approaches. Research indicates that introducing metacognitive concepts early, in developmentally appropriate ways, allows learners to gradually refine their knowledge and skills over time.

From an educational standpoint, explicit instruction is essential in fostering metacognitive skills throughout early schooling. Dimmitt and McCormick (2012) highlight that one of the most critical factors in metacognitive development is providing children with ample opportunities to “experiment with different strategies and figure out what works in an intentional way.” (Smith-Ferguson, 2020:11)

This highlights the importance of structured support and deliberate practice in nurturing metacognitive growth in young learners. As they further emphasize: “Growth in metacognitive abilities may not occur in the absence of instruction focused on developing those strategies.” (Dimmitt, McCormick, 2012:164)

This suggests that metacognitive development is not merely a byproduct of learning but requires explicit teaching and guided practice to help children cultivate effective self-regulation and problem-solving skills.

3.1.3 Fostering metacognitive growth in young learners.

Vygotsky (1978) posits that children learn best when metacognitive strategies are introduced within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—where tasks are challenging but achievable with guidance. Explicit teaching methods, scaffolding, and modelling are therefore critical in helping young learners develop metacognitive awareness. Ellis and Ibrahim (2019:10) stress that children are often underestimated in their ability to think about their own thinking, yet with appropriate instruction, they can develop effective learning strategies that promote long-term success in foreign language acquisition.
As seen previously, "Much research has shown that even very young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge and ability that they are rarely given credit for, and that this can be developed" (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:10). Young learners often lack the inherent ability to reflect on their learning processes, making teacher guidance essential in fostering metacognitive awareness. Children, furthermore, "can be helped-given the opportunity, and asked the right questions-to express themselves in a purposeful and meaningful way about their leaning experiences" (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:10)

This chapter will explore:

- The role of metacognitive strategies in foreign language learning and why they are essential for young learners.
- How young learners develop metacognitive awareness and why they need explicit instruction.
- The importance of teacher metacognitive awareness in effectively modelling and implementing these strategies in the classroom.
- Empirical research supporting metacognitive strategy instruction for young language learners

By integrating research from Flavell (1979), Oxford(1990), O'Malley and Chamot(1990), Ellis and Ibrahim(2019), this chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of how metacognitive strategies can be effectively taught in foreign language classrooms for young learners. Furthermore, it will examine how teachers' own metacognitive practices shape their ability to foster these skills in students, highlighting the importance of teacher self-awareness and professional development in metacognitive instruction.

3.2 Metacognition, Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Learning Metacognition-theory

Over time, various researchers have contributed to shaping the conceptualization of metacognition, refining its core processes and components. Developmental psychologist John Flavell, a key figure in metacognition research, identified two primary components:

metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences. Metacognitive knowledge refers to an individual's awareness of their cognitive abilities, their understanding of a given task, and the strategies required to efficiently allocate resources for learning. For example, "you sense (metacognitive experience) that you do not yet know a certain chapter in your text well enough to pass tomorrow's exam, so you read it through once more (cognitive strategy, aimed at the straightforward cognitive goal of simply improving your knowledge)" (Flavell, 1979:908) According to Flavell (1979:908), this knowledge significantly influences how individuals engage with, process, and reflect on information.

On the other hand, metacognitive experiences involve conscious reflections before, during, and after cognitive activities, where metacognitive knowledge is utilized and refined. Flavell (1979:907) suggested that such experiences are most prominent when an individual is engaged in complex, highly reflective thinking. For example, "you wonder (metacognitive experience) if you understand the chapter well enough to pass tomorrow's exam, so you try to find out by asking yourself questions about it and noting how well you are able to answer them (metacognitive strategy)." Therefore, "cognitive strategies are invoked to make cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to monitor it" (Flavell 1979:909)

Following Flavell's framework, subsequent researchers introduced different perspectives, emphasizing distinct mechanisms within metacognition. Brown (1987) focused on the regulatory aspects, highlighting the importance of monitoring, evaluating, and modifying cognitive processes. Schraw and Dennison (1994:460) expanded on this by distinguishing between knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition, offering a structured way to understand metacognitive processes.

> Building on these regulatory processes, Zimmerman (2000) introduced a self-regulated learning (SRL) model, which provides further insight into the interplay between metacognition, motivation, and behavioural regulation. According to Zimmerman (2000) "self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (in Boekaerts et al. 2000:16)

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is defined as goal-directed learning that is guided by metacognition (awareness of own learning processes and knowledge), strategic action (planning, monitoring, and outcomes evaluation), and mastery orientation (pursuit of learning goals and cognitive challenge) and it is a well-established construct within the social-cognitive literature.

Zimmerman's model consists of three key phases, each incorporating metacognitive elements:

1. Forethought Phase – This initial stage involves task analysis, where learners set goals and plan strategies, alongside self-motivational beliefs, which influence their engagement and persistence.
2. Performance Phase – Here, learners actively employ self-control strategies and self-monitoring techniques to sustain focus and track progress.
3. Self-Reflection Phase – In this final stage, individuals engage in self-evaluation and judgment, comparing their performance against initial goals. Their reactions—both cognitive and emotional—drive modifications in their learning strategies, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation.

   (Boekaerts et al. 2000:16)

Zimmerman's model highlights that learning is an iterative process, where individuals proactively plan, execute, and refine their strategies based on reflection and feedback. This

aligns with broader metacognitive theories by reinforcing the idea that successful learners are actively engaged in regulating their own learning processes.

3.2.1 Metacognition vs. Self-Regulation-terminology: a clarification

While metacognition and self-regulation are often discussed together, they are not interchangeable concepts. Self-regulation refers to a broader process where learners monitor, control, and direct their own learning, encompassing not only cognitive regulation but also motivation and emotional regulation.
"Essentially, self-regulation is about the extent to which learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the strategies they use to learn, can motivate themselves to engage in learning, and can develop strategies and tactics to enhance learning" (Muijs, Bokhove, 2020: 5).
Despite these overlaps, metacognition is specifically focused on cognitive monitoring and regulation, rather than broader emotional and motivational aspects.
Metacognition "is specifically about the ways learners can monitor and purposefully direct their learning, for example by deciding that a particular strategy for memorisation is likely to be successful, monitoring whether it has indeed been successful, and then deliberately changing (or not changing) their memorisation method based on that evidence" (Muijs, Bokhove, 2020: 5). "Some studies consider self-regulation to be a part of metacognition, while others see metacognition as a part of self-regulation" (Veenman et al., 2006, in Muijs, Bokhove, 2020: 5).
Despite the claim that "the latter view- metacognition as a part of self-regulation- has largely prevailed" (Muijs, Bokhove, 2020: 5) for clarity and the purpose of this thesis, focus here on an exploration of intentionality as part of student's metacognition about LLS use, and teacher's intentions to instruct students in using strategies. References will be made to metacognition and metacognitive strategies because this distinction reinforces the importance in this chapter and thesis of focusing on metacognition rather than self-regulation, as metacognition is directly tied to how learners monitor, evaluate, and regulate their cognitive processes—without conflating, despite their importance, these processes with motivation or emotional regulation. By emphasizing metacognition, educators can provide learners with concrete thinking strategies to enhance their learning autonomy and academic success.

3.3 Language learning strategies(LLS): Role and importance of metacognitive strategies

Since the late 1970s, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been at the forefront of second language acquisition (SLA) research, shifting the focus from teacher-centred methods to learner autonomy. Oxford (2003) notes that LLS enhance students' language proficiency and self-regulation, making learners more independent:
"Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners." (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991in Oxford ,2003:9)
In a comparative study of three major classification frameworks (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1981), Hsiao and Oxford (2002) concluded that Oxford's (1990) system—comprising six primary strategy types (Metacognitive, Cognitive, Memory,

Compensation, Social, and Affective)—was the most effective in encompassing the diverse range of strategies employed by language learners (Chamot, 2004:17). Oxford (1990) provides a widely used definition of LLS, describing them as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations." (Oxford, 1990:8) These strategies serve to foster students' awareness regarding how to take control of their language learning enhance and improve self-regulation and foster deeper engagement with language learning.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are not merely techniques for efficient learning; they play a crucial role in fostering self-regulation, autonomy, and problem-solving skills in learners. Among these, O'Malley and Chamot (1990:8) emphasize that "metacognitive strategies help students become self-regulated learners, equipped to manage their learning autonomously" Similarly, Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (in Oxford 2003:12). This suggests that metacognitive strategies act as a guiding framework, directing and optimizing cognitive processes during learning tasks.

Flavell (1979:909) further clarifies this relationship by explaining that "Cognitive strategies are invoked to make cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to monitor it". In other words, while cognitive strategies help learners process and retain information, metacognitive strategies oversee and regulate these processes, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. In the context of foreign language learning, metacognitive strategies enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language acquisition, fostering a more structured, reflective, and self-directed approach to learning.

Within second language acquisition (SLA), metacognitive strategies have become essential tools for fostering learner autonomy and self-regulation. Oxford's (1990) classification of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) highlights how metacognitive strategies help learners plan, organize, and evaluate their language learning process, making them more independent and effective learners. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) reinforced this by conceptualizing metacognition as a set of executive functions, enabling learners to better manage both receptive and productive language tasks.

More recent contributions, such as Cohen and Henry's (2010), emphasize that metacognitive strategies involve conscious, deliberate actions to direct and optimize learning. His work reinforces the idea that successful language learners are actively engaged in self-regulation, strategic planning, and continuous adaptation of their learning behaviours to improve their proficiency.

Overall, metacognitive strategies are not merely optional techniques but fundamental elements of effective foreign language learning. These strategies empower learners to actively control their learning process, enhance problem-solving abilities, and develop long-term autonomy. As research in SLA continues to evolve, the role of metacognition remains central to fostering successful, self-directed language learners who can effectively navigate the complexities of acquiring a new language.

3.3.1 Oxford's (1990) Taxonomy of Metacognitive Strategies

Oxford (1990) developed an influential classification of language learning strategies, as seen above, distinguishing direct and indirect strategies. Metacognitive strategies fall under indirect

strategies, which help learners manage and regulate their learning. According to Oxford, metacognitive strategies include:

- Centering Learning – Directing attention to important aspects of a language task (e.g., previewing vocabulary before reading).
- Arranging and Planning Learning – Setting goals, planning study time, and creating effective learning environments.

Evaluating Learning – Assessing one's own progress, identifying weaknesses, and making adjustments. (Oxford 1990:20)

Thus, metacognitive strategies involve "identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy (Oxford 2003:12) are employed for managing the learning process overall.

Oxford (1990:136) emphasizes that "metacognitive strategies are essential for successful language learning" when consciously used to regulate their learning behaviours, reinforces the importance of self-awareness and active engagement in language acquisition.

3.3.2 O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification ofLLS emerged from interviews with experts and novices and theoretical analyses of reading comprehension and problem solving. Language learning strategies are differentiated into the three primary categories cognitive, metacognitive and affective or social strategies.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) conceptualized metacognitive strategies as a set of executive functions that enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning activities. While they defined these strategies as higher-order skills essential for self-regulated learning, they further categorized them into four distinct subsets based on whether they are applied to receptive (listening and reading) or productive (speaking and writing) language tasks. This classification provides a structured approach for learners to manage their comprehension and production of language more effectively. (O'Malley, Chamot, 1990:44)

3.3.3 Cohen and Henry's (2010) Perspective

Cohen (2010:171) expands on metacognitive strategy research by emphasizing that these strategies involve the "processes which learners consciously use in order to supervise or manage their language learning." His framework highlights how learners intentionally regulate their cognitive processes to enhance comprehension, retention, and skill development. According to Cohen and Henry (2010:171), metacognitive strategies allow learners to "control their own cognition by planning what they will do, checking how it is going, and then evaluating how it went.". This self-regulation is crucial in enabling learners to monitor their progress and make necessary adjustments.

Furthermore, Cohen (2010:182) highlights the role of self-awareness in language learning, arguing that "if learners are made aware of the importance of these individual difference variables, and are given tools for dealing with them, they are likely to take more responsibility

for their own learning and will adopt those attitudes and techniques that characterize the good language learner. “This perspective aligns with his broader view that successful learners actively engage in their language acquisition journey through strategic and conscious effort.
Additionally, Cohen and Henry (2010:183) highlights the role of self-motivation in metacognitive strategy use, stating that “self-motivating strategies may play a role in empowering learners to be more committed and enthusiastic language learners.” Even in challenging learning environments, some learners persist in achieving their goals by applying metacognitive strategies that help sustain their motivation and focus. This conscious engagement in learning reflects Cohen and Henry’s belief that “cognitive strategies encompass the language learning strategies of identification, grouping, retention and storage of language material, as well as the language use strategies of retrieval, rehearsal and comprehension or production of words, phrases and other elements of the L2.” (Cohen, Henry, 2010:171)
Ultimately, Cohen and Henry’s (2010) model reinforces the idea that active engagement, self-awareness, and intentional regulation of cognitive processes are critical components of effective language learning. His emphasis on conscious strategy use provides valuable insights into how learners can optimize their approach to acquiring a second language.
To conclude, metacognitive strategies are not just supplementary techniques but fundamental to successful foreign language learning. The evolution of research in this area—from Flavell’s (1979) foundational model to Oxford’s (1990) classification of LLS and Cohen and Henry’s (2010) emphasis on conscious strategy use—has provided a comprehensive understanding of how learners can actively regulate their cognitive processes to improve comprehension, retention, and overall proficiency.
Metacognition enables learners to take charge of their language learning, guiding them through planning, monitoring, and evaluating their strategies to optimize learning outcomes. O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) classification highlights metacognition as an executive function, supporting cognitive strategy use and ensuring learners can manage both receptive and productive language tasks effectively.
Cohen and Henry’s (2010) research expands on this perspective, highlighting that successful language learners actively engage in self-regulation, strategic planning, and continuous adaptation of their learning behaviours. Their insights into self-motivation and metacognitive awareness underline the necessity of explicit instruction and conscious strategy application in language learning.
As second and foreign language research continues to evolve, the role of metacognitive strategies remains central to developing independent, self-directed learners. These strategies equip language learners with the tools to navigate complex linguistic challenges, sustain motivation, and refine their skills continuously. Thus, fostering metacognitive awareness is not merely an academic endeavour—it is an essential step toward empowering learners to become autonomous, reflective, and strategic in their approach to mastering a new language.

3.4 Language Learning Strategy Instruction and Metacognitive Strategy Instruction-approaches

Despite widespread recognition of the benefits of language learning strategies (LLS), research regarding teacher’s implementation in classrooms remains limited and inconsistent (Chamot, Harris, 2019:271). “There is limited evidence on the current state of teacher knowledge about

metacognition and metacognitive pedagogy. Our current understanding is informed by studies exploring professional development programs aimed at improving teachers' metacognitive knowledge." (Smith-Ferguson, J, 2020:13).
While many educators acknowledge the value of LLS in enhancing student learning, various challenges hinder their effective integration into instruction.
Rubin and Acero Rios highlight the "concerns of many language teacher educators who have promoted Language Learner Strategy Instruction (LLSI) with their students but noted that they often fail to integrate it into their lessons in spite of the extensive literature on its value and a wealth of practical suggestions." (Chamot, Harris. 2019: 227) This gap between theory and practice highlights the need for structured support to help teachers incorporate LLS into their teaching.
One key approach and "solution" is metacognitive strategy instruction, which focuses on helping learners develop awareness and control over their own learning processes. The learners in this case are the teachers! Oxford (2011) and other scholars emphasize that it is "critical to introduce student teachers to the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating" (in Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 227). Without explicit training in these skills, teachers may struggle to apply them effectively in the classroom. Moreover, Vieira (2007) asserts that "teacher and learner autonomy are inextricably linked" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris 2019: 227), reinforcing the notion that teachers must be equipped with the ability to self-regulate in order to support their students in doing the same. (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 228) emphasize that "the integration of self-management procedures in language learning strategy instruction can not only provide teachers with useful tools to critically reflect on what happens in their classrooms but also provide learners with techniques for reflecting on their own learning" and hence it is only when teachers can identify problems and set and monitor their own goals that they can enable their learners to do the same. In this way, metacognitive awareness benefits both educators and students, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and self-reflection. However, this will be discussed further along in the chapter.

3.4.1 Metacognitive Strategy Instruction: Explicit vs. Implicit Approaches

Metacognitive strategy instruction plays a critical role in helping learners develop awareness and control over their own learning processes. One of the key distinctions in metacognitive instruction lies in the contrast between explicit and implicit strategy instruction.
Explicit Strategy Instruction
Explicit instruction ensures that learners not only understand what strategies to use but also when, why, and how to apply them effectively across different learning contexts. According to Dignath and Veenman (2020:7), "Explicit instruction means that the teacher clearly instructs the students about a strategy by explaining and demonstrating how to execute a particular strategy, clarifying benefits of strategy use, and supporting students in strategy application".
This structured approach involves direct demonstration, clear explanations, and explicit prompts to encourage strategy use, fostering students' ability to actively regulate their learning.
Implicit Strategy Instruction
In contrast, implicit strategy instruction relies on indirect guidance, modelling, and exposure rather than explicit explanations. However, research suggests that implicit instruction is most effective after learners have already received explicit strategy training. Dignath and Veenman

(2020:7) state that “Students first have to be trained in self-regulation strategies explicitly in order to benefit from implicit instruction and modelling”.
Implicit instruction may involve teachers modelling effective learning behaviours, providing structured practice opportunities, and using reflective questioning to guide students toward metacognitive awareness without explicitly naming or explaining strategies. As Dignath and Veenman (2020:7) further explain: “Implicit instruction can be an effective way of stimulating strategy use once students are already experienced in using a certain strategy”.
The distinction between explicit and implicit metacognitive strategy instruction highlights the importance of a progressive approach to teaching metacognitive skills. While explicit instruction lays the foundation by equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills, implicit instruction further supports their ability to independently apply these strategies in different learning contexts. By combining both approaches effectively, educators can foster self-regulated, strategic learners who actively engage in monitoring and optimizing their own learning processes. This lends to and leads to the function of scaffolding in teaching.

3.4.2 The Role of Scaffolding in Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

Scaffolding is a crucial element in metacognitive strategy instruction, as it supports learners in developing strategic awareness while gradually increasing their independence. The role of scaffolding is particularly significant in helping students internalize metacognitive strategies. Dignath and Veenman (2020:10) explain that “scaffolding implies that the teacher adapts his or her support to the needs of the student who is carrying out a task” allowing learners to observe, imitate, and gradually take control of their learning strategies.
Moreover, teachers can integrate implicit scaffolding by modelling strategies without explicitly verbalizing them. According to Dignath and Veenman (2020:11), teachers can support students in learning metacognitive strategies without explicitly addressing them by demonstrating “a procedure without verbalizing what they are doing or why a strategy is useful”. This approach enables thinking through observation and practice rather than through direct instruction.
By progressively reducing external support and promoting independent application of strategies, scaffolding empowers students to take ownership of their learning. As Dignath and Veenman (2020:10) highlight utilising the term “fading”,and “fading occurs when the teacher slowly removes his or her support and gives more and more responsibility to the student”. This gradual shift is essential in fostering learner autonomy and long-term metacognitive development.
Mariani and Pozzo (2002) suggest that knowledge construction aligns with these findings: “Metacognitive instruction does not only address the aspects of ‘knowing’ and ‘knowing how to do,’ but also the often-overlooked aspects of ‘knowing how to be’ and ‘knowing how to learn,’ by fostering awareness of what is being done” (Mariani, Pozzo, 2002 in Caon, 2016:86). The educator “Non interviene solo sugli aspetti di 'sapere' e di 'saper fare' ma anche su quelli più trascurati del 'saper essere' e del 'saper apprendere', attraverso lo sviluppo di consapevolezza per quello che si sta facendo.” This perspective highlights the idea that metacognitive instruction must cultivate not only procedural knowledge but also self-awareness, identity as a learner, and the ability to regulate one's own learning process.
Building on this, a balanced instructional approach is necessary to develop these dimensions of metacognition effectively. Explicit instruction provides a structured foundation, equipping students with the tools to recognize and regulate their own learning processes. Meanwhile,

implicit scaffolding serves as a reinforcement mechanism, allowing learners to refine and internalize these strategies through experience. By integrating both explicit and implicit approaches, educators can help students transition from guided strategy use to independent, self-regulated, and flexible application of metacognitive strategies, ultimately fostering the deeper self-awareness and autonomous learning that Mariani and Pozzo (2002) advocate.

3.5 Metacognitive Strategy Approaches and Instruction in the Mixed-Ability Class

In a classroom with students of varying differences, teachers must adapt their instruction to cater to diverse learning needs. Research suggests that a combination of direct and indirect strategy instruction, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction can make language learning more inclusive and equitable (Caon, 2016:86; Dignath,Veenman, 2020:10-11).
Differentiated teaching refers to methods teachers use to extend the knowledge and skills of every student in every class, regardless of their starting point. The objective is to lift the performance of all students, including those who are falling behind and those ahead of year level expectations. (Hattie ,2012)

3.5.1 Peer Tutoring and Metacognitive Development

In a mixed-ability classroom, metacognitive instruction plays a vital role in fostering student autonomy, self-regulation, and deeper learning strategies. One of the most effective approaches for developing these skills is peer tutoring, which is grounded in the principle of reciprocity. As Caon (2016:79) states, “With the goal of giving value to a wide range of intelligences and cognitive styles, differences multiply opportunities for interaction and exchange.” Through this process, students not only reinforce their own understanding but also learn how to manage and direct their learning processes by teaching others.
Peer tutoring is particularly effective because it simultaneously develops cognitive and metacognitive strategies (“sviluppa al contempo strategie cognitive e metacognitive”)(Caon 2016: 77). This means that students do not merely acquire knowledge, but also learn how to structure, communicate, and refine their understanding in ways that make their learning more explicit and adaptable.
A crucial metacognitive element of peer tutoring is the dual focus on content (‘what’) and process (‘how’), allowing students to become more aware of their own learning strategies. As Caon (2016:77) explains, “The tutor’s reflection thus focuses both on content (the ‘what’) and on procedures (the ‘how’). This complex interaction activates deeper cognitive and metacognitive processes.”
Additionally, peer tutoring engages multiple intelligences, as it requires students to empathize, understand others’ needs, and interpret communicative efforts. In this way, “tutoraggio tra pari, quindi, può aiutare gli studenti a valorizzare diverse intelligenze e a dare uno sviluppo più ampio alla propria personalità” (Caon, 2016: 77) This reinforces not only cognitive flexibility but also self-awareness and adaptability—key components of metacognitive growth.

3.5.2 The Impact of Peer Tutoring on Self-Regulated Learning

Metacognitive instruction aims to guide students toward self-regulation and independent learning, and peer tutoring serves as a powerful tool in this process. As Cook, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and Casto (1985) emphasize, "The overall effects of the use of peers as co-teachers (of themselves and of others) in classes is, overall, quite powerful. If the aim is to teach students self-regulation and control over their own learning, then they must move from being students to being teachers of themselves." (Hattie, 2012:186)
This transition from learner to teacher is fundamental because, as Hattie (2012:187) states, "When students become teachers of others, they learn as much as those they are teaching. When they have some control or autonomy over this teaching, the effects are higher." Thus, peer tutoring fosters both self-monitoring and strategic learning, enabling students to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement—a fundamental aspect of metacognition.

3.5.3 Metacognitive Teaching and Goal-Setting in a Mixed-Ability Class

To implement effective metacognitive instruction in a mixed-ability setting, it is essential for teachers to establish clear instructional goals. Marzano (1998) stresses that "the effective teacher is one who has clear instructional goals. These goals are communicated both to students and to parents. Ideally, the instructional goals address elements of the knowledge domains as well as the cognitive, meta-cognitive and self-system" (Hattie, 2012:203). This highlights the importance of making students aware of the learning objectives and helping them reflect on their own progress.
One of the key strategies in metacognitive instruction is helping students define learning goals and monitor their progress. Hattie (2012:246) outlines the fundamental metacognitive questions that guide students toward greater autonomy: "Where are we going?", "How are we going?", and "Where to next?" By encouraging students to actively engage in this reflective process, teachers help them develop higher-order thinking skills and independent learning habits.

3.5.4 The Role of Adaptive Teaching in Metacognitive Instruction

Since a mixed-ability classroom presents diverse learning needs, teachers must be highly flexible and adaptable in their instructional methods. Hattie (2012:246) emphasizes that "teachers need to be 'adaptive learning experts' who not only use many of the effective strategies outlined in these chapters but also have high levels of flexibility that allow them to innovate when routines are not enough." This adaptability is essential for addressing students' different cognitive profiles and metacognitive capacities.
Additionally, a metacognitive approach to instruction helps students develop frameworks and organize knowledge in ways that enhance retrieval and application. Hattie (2012:246) highlights that "a meta-cognitive approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them.". This is particularly important in a mixed-ability setting, where students must navigate different levels of challenge and personalize their learning strategies.

Metacognitive instruction in a mixed-ability classroom should be structured around peer collaboration, goal-setting, and strategic self-regulation. Peer tutoring emerges as a particularly effective method, as it simultaneously enhances metacognitive skills, fosters self-regulated learning, and engages multiple intelligences. By promoting awareness of learning strategies, encouraging adaptability, and supporting student autonomy, teachers can create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where all students—regardless of ability—can thrive.
Teachers can maximize peer learning through strategic grouping. "Mixed-ability grouping can be an effective strategy, allowing higher-achieving students to model learning strategies while lower-achieving students gain exposure to different approaches" (Dignath, Veenman, 2020: 9). However, "care must be taken to avoid over-reliance on more advanced students, ensuring that all learners are actively engaged in the strategy-learning process" (Dignath, Veenman, 2020: 9).
Coppola(2000) similarly emphasizes the importance of interpersonal adaptability in strategy use, stating that such awareness is essential because it helps create minds capable of adapting—both intrapersonally, in selecting the most suitable strategies for different tasks, and interpersonally, in using different teaching strategies to support peers in tutoring or cooperative learning settings ."Si propone di formare quelle abilità mentali superiori che vanno al di là dei processi cognitivi primari, quali leggere, calcolare, ricordare, cercando di sviluppare nell'apprendente la consapevolezza di cosa sta facendo, del perché lo fa, di quando e in quali condizioni è opportuno farlo." (Coppola, 2000 in Caon, 2016:86).
Hartman (2001:152) also states that according to research "cooperative learning increases confidence in students' abilities. It improves self-esteem as well as feelings of competence in specific subjects and …The best way to learn something is to teach it."

3.5.5 Evaluation and Reflection in Strategy Use

Evaluation and reflection play a critical role in metacognitive strategy instruction. "Enabling learners to reflect on their use of metacognitive strategies leads to larger effects of strategy training" (Dignath, Veenman, 2020: 7). "Regular post-task reflections and feedback help students regulate their learning" and this can be carried out directly by the teacher but also by sharing experiences with peers (Chamot,Harris, 2019: 162) In addition, "Reflecting on strategy use can also help to transfer the application of a certain strategy to another task or even another subject area" (Dignath, Veenman, 2020:7)
Similarly, Caon highlights the importance of self-regulation in strategy instruction: "The use of a strategy implies an attempt, more or less consciously controlled, to adapt cognitive processes to the demands of a task in order to achieve a goal and since this adaptability varies among individuals, strategies become an important source of individual differences" (Boscolo, 1997 in Caon, 2016:85). "L'uso di una strategia implica il tentativo, più o meno consapevolmente controllato, di adattare i processi cognitivi alle esigenze di un compito, in vista di un obiettivo da raggiungere." (Boscolo, 1997 in Caon, 2016:85).

3.5.6 The Impact of Metacognitive Awareness on Strategy Use

Metacognitive strategy instruction also extends to how learners retrieve and organize information. "The function of retrieving information from long-term memory is a process,

whereas the method for facilitating and controlling this retrieval (such as using notes, journals, etc.) is a strategy" (Boscolo, 1997 in Caon, 2016:85). "La funzione di recuperare informazioni dalla memoria a lungo termine è un processo, mentre la modalità per facilitare e controllare questo recupero (quale il ricorso ad appunti, diari, ecc.) è una strategia." (Boscolo, 1997 in Caon, 2016:85).
The integration of LLS and metacognitive strategy instruction into language teaching fosters autonomy, confidence, and strategic awareness among both teachers and learners. Differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and reflective assessment strategies ensure that students with diverse needs receive tailored support. Ultimately, metacognitive instruction provides students with the tools necessary to regulate their learning, making education more inclusive and effective in mixed-ability classrooms.

3.5.7 Why Metacognition and strategy instruction is Essential for Young Language Learners-Focus on the Primary school classroom

Teaching metacognitive strategies to young language learners is crucial for fostering autonomy, self-awareness, and effective learning. Capperucci (2017:216) highlights that metacognitive instruction enables children to reflect on their learning processes, promoting meaningful engagement. As he states, "Reflection on language can be introduced in the last years of primary school... because it provides the child with the conditions to analyse the structures and the way of thinking which underlies the language". Developing these strategies gradually ensures they align with the child's cognitive development, allowing for a more natural integration into language learning.
Additionally, Capperucci (2017:217) emphasizes the importance of self-assessment and incremental feedback in metacognitive instruction, noting that "It is important that the teacher constantly asks the child's opinion on task executions... inviting him/her to justify choices and processes". Encouraging young learners to evaluate their learning fosters a sense of responsibility and independence in their language acquisition journey.
Further, research indicates that metacognitive strategies should be embedded in authentic learning contexts, reinforcing real-world applications of language. As Capperucci (2017:214) asserts, "Authentic communicative settings should be drawn from the classroom environment, events, or concrete problems pupils encounter". This perspective aligns with current approaches to contextualized learning, ensuring that young learners develop metacognitive awareness in practical, meaningful ways.
By integrating self-reflection, peer collaboration, and contextual learning, educators can cultivate a 'learning to learn' mindset in young language learners, equipping them with essential cognitive tools for lifelong learning. Research further supports the importance of strategy awareness, as "Strategy awareness helps children become better learners" (Moon, 2005 in Chamot, Harris, 2019:156).
Ellis and Ibrahim (2019:9) reinforce this point, stating that there is "a great deal of variation in policy and in models of English language instruction leading to teachers finding themselves with classes of children with diverse learning needs, as well as varying levels of English". Therefore, there is growing awareness of the need to foster a 'learning to learn' environment among primary school English language teachers.
"Learning to learn is primarily concerned with the processes of learning and aims to focus the child's attention on what they are doing—and why—in order to develop their awareness of the

learning process and better understand how they learn, in addition to what they learn" (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:9). This insight highlights the importance of metacognitive awareness in young language learners, emphasizing the need to cultivate not only linguistic skills but also an understanding of how learning occurs.
Research suggests that young learners possess a significant degree of metacognitive ability, even if they are often not given credit for it. "Much research has shown that even very young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge and ability that they are rarely given credit for, and that this can be developed" (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:10). However, for these skills to be effectively nurtured, structured guidance is essential.

3.5.7.1 The Challenge of Self-Awareness in Young Learners

Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) argue that strategic behaviour in young learners remains largely intuitive until around age fourteen, with teachers playing a crucial role in either explicitly teaching learning procedures or embedding them within their instructional approach. Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986), in a study of children's learning in British primary schools, have argued that "strategic behaviour is largely intuitive until the age of fourteen, and determined largely by the teachers, either through procedures taught explicitly or through approaches implicit in their presentation of classroom tasks. They suggest further, that "children's increasing capacity for conscious planning and direction of their own learning begins to emerge by the age of 10" (cited in Coyle,Valcárcel, 2002:434). This developmental trajectory highlights the need for structured support in fostering metacognitive skills, ensuring that children progressively gain control over their learning strategies.
However, as mentioned previously, Whitebread et al. (2007) and Shamir et al. (2009) provide strong evidence that children as young as three can demonstrate metacognitive awareness and strategy use.

3.5.7.2 Metacognition and Learner Autonomy In Young Language learners

Ellis and Ibrahim (2019) emphasize that children develop autonomy in language learning when teachers explicitly integrate metacognitive strategies into instruction. "When teachers make metacognitive strategies explicit, young learners begin to take more control over their learning, developing autonomy and confidence in their language abilities" (Ellis,Ibrahim, 2019:10). Rather than assuming that young learners will naturally develop self-regulation skills, educators must intentionally scaffold metacognitive processes to help them understand how to plan, monitor, and reflect on their language learning.
By incorporating structured reflection, goal-setting, and self-monitoring activities, teachers foster greater independence and self-regulation in young learners. Teaching metacognitive strategies in a deliberate and systematic way enables children to become more engaged and effective language learners, ultimately contributing to their overall cognitive and linguistic development as "children can learn the skills of learning with the intervention of the teacher" (Ellis,Ibrahim, 2019:9)

3.6 The Role of Teachers' Metacognitive Awareness in Metacognitive Strategy Teaching

As mentioned earlier, Oxford (2011) highlights the importance of introducing student and preservice teachers to metacognitive strategies, stating that it is "critical to introduce student teachers to the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019 :227). Without explicit training in these essential skills, teachers may struggle to implement them effectively in the classroom.

Furthermore, Vieira (2007) underscores the strong connection between teacher and learner autonomy, emphasizing that "teacher and learner autonomy are inextricably linked" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019:227). This reinforces the idea that teachers must develop self-regulation skills to effectively guide their students in becoming autonomous learners.

The following section will highlight the importance of teachers' metacognitive awareness and its impact on the quality of metacognitive strategy instruction by examining various perspectives and studies. Hartman's (2001) research primarily provides valuable insights into metacognition from a broader perspective. In contrast, other studies discussed in this section specifically explore metacognitive instruction in young learners' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, offering more targeted insights relevant to this research.

Teachers' metacognitive awareness—their ability to reflect on and regulate their own thinking—plays a crucial role in how effectively they teach metacognitive strategies in the classroom. Research emphasizes that "teachers need to self-regulate their instruction before, during, and after conducting lessons in order to maximize their effectiveness with students" (Hartman 2001:149). Teachers who actively engage in self-reflection and strategic instructional planning are more effective in fostering students' metacognitive development, as they continuously assess and refine their teaching approach. This section explores how teachers' awareness of their own metacognitive processes influences their instructional decision-making and enhances the effectiveness of metacognitive teaching.

3.6.1 Teaching With and For Metacognition

According to Hartman (2001), teaching metacognitively involves two complementary approaches:

1. Teaching with metacognition – where teachers are aware of and regulate their own thinking while planning, delivering, and evaluating lessons.
2. Teaching for metacognition – where teachers explicitly model metacognitive strategies to help students develop awareness of their own thinking processes.

"Teaching with metacognition means teachers think about their own thinking regarding instructional goals, teaching strategies, sequence, materials, students' characteristics and needs, and other issues related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment before, during, and after lessons in order to maximize their instructional effectiveness" (Hartman, 2001:149). Teachers who engage in structured self-reflection not only refine their own teaching but also create more effective learning experiences for their students.

On the other hand, "teaching for metacognition means teachers think about how their instruction will activate and develop their students' metacognition or thinking about their own thinking as learners" (Hartman, 2001:149). This approach includes modelling self-questioning

techniques, encouraging students to plan and evaluate their learning, and providing structured opportunities for reflection.

3.6.2 The Importance of Teacher Metacognitive Awareness -How Teachers' Own Metacognition Influences Instruction, or does it?

Despite growing recognition of the importance of metacognition in education, research on teachers' actual knowledge and use of metacognitive pedagogy remains limited. As highlighted in existing studies,

"There is limited evidence on the current state of teacher knowledge about metacognition and metacognitive pedagogy. Our current understanding is informed by studies exploring professional development programs aimed at improving teachers' metacognitive knowledge. Broadly speaking, these programs are successful in making teachers more aware of, and comfortable thinking about, metacognitive processes." (Smith-Ferguson, 2020:13).

Teachers' metacognitive awareness directly impacts their ability to guide students in developing metacognitive skills. However, many educators fail to engage in structured reflection, often teaching the way they were taught rather than critically analysing their methods. Research has found that "many teachers conduct lessons without adequate advance planning and without adequately checking to see how a lesson is going while it is underway" (Hartman, 2001:150).

Without metacognitive awareness, teachers may neglect:

- The rationale behind instructional strategies and how they can be adapted to different students.
- The cognitive demands of tasks on students and whether students require additional scaffolding.
- Monitoring student progress and making real-time adjustments to instruction.
  (Hartman, 2001:150)

Research on expert versus novice teachers shows that experts, or more experienced teachers, are better able to monitor, interpret and evaluate what occurs in a classroom during instruction than novices, or inexperienced teachers. Whereas novices were only able to describe classroom behaviour, experts were able to explain it (Sabers, Cushing and Berliner, 1991in Hartman, 2001:150). This suggests that experience and exposure with time improves quality of metacognitive instruction.

In addition, metacognition in teaching extends beyond understanding subject content—it also involves being aware of the instructional strategies in one's own teaching repertoire, their purpose, appropriate contexts for use, and the methods for implementing them effectively. This metacognitive awareness is essential for lesson planning, making real-time instructional adjustments, and selecting alternative strategies when a teaching approach proves ineffective. Hartman, 2001:154).

Research highlights that preservice teachers often require "explicit information about teaching strategies, because they may not know how to implement teaching strategies they learn in their undergraduate courses" (Hartman, 2001:157) and struggle to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. For example, a study on beginning teachers found that, despite being trained to use phonics for teaching letter sounds, they were unable to explicitly articulate the procedures needed to implement phonics instruction for early readers (Moore and Harris, 1986 in Hartman, 2001:157).

This highlights the importance of metacognitive awareness in teacher education, ensuring that teachers not only learn pedagogical strategies but also develop the ability to analyse, adapt, and effectively implement them in real classroom scenarios.

3.6.3 Teachers' Self-Regulation and Instructional Planning

Metacognitively aware teachers engage in a structured cycle of self-regulation, which includes:
1. Planning: Setting learning objectives, anticipating student difficulties, and selecting instructional strategies.
2. Monitoring: Assessing student engagement and comprehension during the lesson.
3. Evaluating: Reflecting on what worked and what did not, making adjustments for future instruction.

Hartman (2001:152) emphasizes that "preparation for teaching not only benefits students but also increases the instructor's own learning and motivation". Effective teachers plan in advance, monitor their approach, and evaluate its impact, ensuring they adapt their methods to maximize student learning.

The following study examined how future EFL teachers' metacognitive awareness impacts their teaching effectiveness in young learner classrooms.

3.6.4 A Study: Metacognitive Awareness in Prospective EFL Teachers: A Key to Effective Teaching

Metacognitive awareness has long been recognized as an essential factor in effective learning, but its role in teacher education—particularly for prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers—is equally significant. Su-Bergil's (2020) study delves into this connection, examining how future EFL teachers' metacognitive awareness impacts their teaching effectiveness in young learner classrooms. Focusing on third- and fourth year ELT undergraduate students at Amasya University, the research explores the extent to which metacognitive awareness predicts teaching success and how micro-teaching experiences contribute to its development.

The study found a clear relationship between metacognitive awareness and teaching performance. Prospective teachers who demonstrated higher metacognitive awareness were more successful in their micro-teaching sessions, particularly in planning lessons, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating their own teaching strategies. As the research states, "The overall metacognitive awareness levels of prospective teachers are a significant predictor of their teaching skills that they are expected to reveal during the micro-teaching practices of Teaching English to Young Learners course." (Su-Bergil, 2020:169).

Statistical analysis further reinforced this finding, revealing that 20% of the variance in teaching performance could be explained by differences in metacognitive awareness levels. This suggests that metacognitive awareness is not just an abstract cognitive ability but a practical tool that shapes how teachers approach their instruction. (Su-Bergil, 2020:168).

Another key observation was that fourth-year students exhibited significantly higher metacognitive awareness than their third-year counterparts. This difference was particularly notable in areas such as procedural knowledge, planning, and comprehension monitoring,

indicating that metacognitive growth occurs as student teachers gain more teaching experience. The study notes,

"The mean values of overall metacognitive levels for the 3rd and 4th grade students are calculated as 67.02 and 78.50, indicating that the overall scores represent an important area for prospective teachers and are expected to develop in time as they gain more practice during their educational lives." (Su-Bergil, 2020:167).

3.6.4.1 Micro-Teaching as a Bridge Between Theory and Practice

One of the most significant insights from the study was the role of micro-teaching in developing metacognitive awareness. Micro-teaching, in which prospective teachers practice delivering lessons in a controlled setting before entering real classrooms, was found to be a crucial factor in helping student teachers apply metacognitive strategies in authentic teaching situations. (Su-Bergil, 2020: 171).

The study highlights the practical value of micro-teaching, stating that, "Microteaching provides opportunities for prospective teachers to practice the teaching skills in an artificial environment before the actual teaching setting they will experience in their future career, which makes it such a practical teacher training technique." (Su-Bergil, 2020: 171).

Despite the theoretical training that teacher education programs offer, practical experience is indispensable in shaping effective educators. The study stresses that metacognitive awareness bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real classroom practice, making it a critical component of teacher development:

"Despite the theoretical knowledge that the teacher education programs provide for the teacher trainees, the field-based experience known as mainly practicum process takes priority since the core knowledge of the teaching skills does not promise the perfect mastery of being a teacher." (Su-Bergil, 2020:171).

Implications for Teacher Education

The findings of this study emphasize the need to integrate metacognitive strategy instruction into teacher education programs. Teaching effectiveness is not solely based on subject knowledge or pedagogical techniques—it also depends on a teacher's ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own teaching practices. As the research concludes, "Metacognitive awareness should have an indispensable place for teacher education because it contributes to the teacher training process by ensuring the opportunity of integrating the practice with reality as a kind of teaching skills reflection for teacher candidates." (Su-Bergil ,2020: 172).

By fostering metacognitive awareness, teacher training programs can equip future educators with the self-regulatory skills necessary to adapt, reflect, and improve upon their teaching strategies. In turn, this enhances their ability to guide young language learners, making them more effective in fostering student engagement and comprehension.

This is also supported by Oxford (2011) and other scholars who emphasize that it is "critical to introduce student teachers to the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 227)

To conclude, the study outlined provides evidence that metacognitive awareness plays a vital role in shaping the effectiveness of prospective EFL teachers. Those with higher metacognitive awareness are not only better prepared to navigate classroom challenges but also more capable of adapting their instructional strategies to meet the needs of young learners. As teacher education programs continue to evolve, prioritizing metacognitive strategy training will be crucial in developing reflective, self-regulated, and effective educators.

3.6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the fundamental role of metacognitive strategy instruction in foreign language learning, with a particular focus on young learners. Research has consistently highlighted that metacognition—thinking about one's thinking—is a critical component of effective learning, as it enables students to regulate their cognitive processes, set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies accordingly (Flavell, 1979; Veenman et al., 2006). While early theories suggested that metacognitive skills develop later in childhood, more recent empirical evidence has demonstrated that even very young learners are capable of metacognitive thinking when provided with the right instructional support and interactive learning environments (Whitebread et al., 2009; Shamir et al., 2009).

A key finding is that metacognitive strategies must be explicitly taught, as they do not always develop spontaneously. Research suggests that direct instruction, modelling, scaffolding, and guided practice are essential for fostering metacognitive awareness in young learners (Dimmitt and McCormick, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework further supports the idea that children learn best when metacognitive strategies are introduced within challenging yet achievable contexts (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019). As research has emphasized, "Much research has shown that even very young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge and ability that they are rarely given credit for, and that this can be developed" (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:10). Capperucci(2017:216) also highlights the role of explicit metacognitive instruction in primary foreign language education, emphasizing that "reflection on language can be introduced in the last years of primary school... because it provides the child with the conditions to analyse the structures and the way of thinking which underlies the language".

Another critical aspect of metacognitive instruction in foreign language learning is the role of peer collaboration. Studies have shown that peer tutoring is an effective method for promoting metacognitive engagement, self-regulation, and cognitive flexibility (Caon, 2016). As Hattie (2012:187) emphasizes, "When students become teachers of others, they learn as much as those they are teaching. When they have some control or autonomy over this teaching, the effects are higher". This reciprocal learning process fosters higher-order thinking and long-term retention of knowledge while simultaneously engaging multiple intelligences ("tutoraggio tra pari, quindi, può aiutare gli studenti a valorizzare diverse intelligenze e a dare uno sviluppo più ampio alla propria personalità" (Caon, 2016: 77).

In addition to its impact on students, metacognitive strategy instruction also has profound implications for teacher education. This chapter has demonstrated that teachers' own metacognitive awareness plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction. Studies indicate that "teachers need to self-regulate their instruction before, during, and after conducting lessons in order to maximize their effectiveness with students" (Hartman, 2001:149). Without structured self-reflection, goal-setting, and strategic planning, educators may struggle to effectively foster metacognitive skills in their students. As Su-Bergil (2020) found, "metacognitive awareness should have an indispensable place for teacher education because it contributes to the teacher training process by ensuring the opportunity of integrating the practice with reality as a kind of teaching skills reflection for teacher candidates" (Su-Bergil, 2020:172). Professional development programs should therefore emphasize teacher metacognition, ensuring that educators have the awareness and instructional flexibility to adapt their teaching to the diverse needs of young learners.

Ultimately, metacognitive strategy instruction is not just a pedagogical tool but a transformative approach to learning. It fosters learner autonomy, encourages deep and reflective thinking, and equips students with the skills they need to become self-directed, strategic learners. As Flavell (1979:909) stated, “Cognitive strategies are invoked to make cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to monitor it”. By integrating metacognitive strategies into foreign language instruction—through explicit teaching, peer collaboration, teacher modelling, and adaptive scaffolding—educators can create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where all students, regardless of ability, can reach their full potential. Furthermore, as research has shown, “learning to learn is primarily concerned with the processes of learning and aims to focus the child’s attention on what they are doing—and why—in order to develop their awareness of the learning process” (Ellis, Ibrahim, 2019:9). By fostering an environment where students understand how they learn, rather than just what they learn, metacognitive instruction becomes a key driver of long-term academic success in foreign language acquisition.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study to examine the use and application of Language Learning Strategies (LLS), specifically metacognitive language strategies-planning, monitoring and evaluating- among pre-service and in-service primary school teachers. The research investigates how teachers' personal use of LLS, particularly, metacognitive strategies, correlates with their intended application and approaches in the classroom, with a particular focus on metacognitive strategies and their relevance in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC).

A questionnaire-based approach was adopted to gather quantitative data, enabling a structured analysis of teachers' strategic behaviours and choices, pedagogical approaches, and demographic influences on LLS application. The following sections detail the research objectives, questionnaire design, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

4.1 Research Objectives and Scope

This study is guided by two primary objectives:

1. To examine how primary school teachers employ LLS in their own language learning, particularly focusing on planning, monitoring, and evaluation as core metacognitive strategies.
2. To investigate how teachers plan to implement these strategies in their teaching, via scenarios/vignettes, especially in EFL classrooms with the perspective of the mixed ability class highlighted in Chapter 1 where individual differences, diversity in linguistic proficiency, learning styles, and motivation among a few, presents an open and dynamic framework.

By exploring the connection between teachers' personal language learning strategy use and their professional application, this study aims to provide insights into teachers' awareness, preparedness, and adaptability in fostering inclusive language education.

Oxford (2011) and other scholars emphasising that it is "critical to introduce student teachers to the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 227). Without explicit training in these skills, teachers may struggle to apply them effectively in the classroom. Moreover, Vieira (2007) asserts that "teacher and learner autonomy are inextricably linked" (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 228), reinforcing the notion that teachers must be equipped with the ability to self-regulate in order to support their students in doing the same. (Rubin, Acero Rios in Chamot, Harris, 2019: 228) emphasize that

"the integration of self-management procedures in language learning strategy instruction can not only provide teachers with useful tools to critically reflect on what happens in their classrooms but also provide learners with techniques for reflecting on their own learning"

and hence it is only when teachers can identify problems and set and monitor their own goals that they can enable their learners to do the same. In this way, metacognitive awareness benefits both educators and students, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and self-reflection.

Thus, this study investigates the interplay between these factors to enhance understanding of their impact on language teaching and learning.

4.2 Contribution to the Field

This research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education by examining how LLS and metacognitive teaching methods can be practically applied and used in diverse classroom settings. By analysing teachers' own us of metacognitive language learning strategies and learning habits and their ability to implement metacognitive strategic instruction, implicit or explicit, the study provides insights that can enhance teacher training programs and instructional methodologies.
Additionally, this research highlights the importance of reflective teaching practices, teacher adaptability, and the role of metacognitive strategies in fostering inclusive classroom environments.
Capperucci (2017:217) emphasizes the importance of the "integration of multiple teaching methods, in which the teacher acts as a guide who helps learners explore new cognitive situations" and in "teaching English as a foreign language in primary school, the adoption of active and participatory teaching approaches"
Additionally, research indicates that "strategy awareness helps children become better learners" (Moon, 2005 in Chamot, Harris, 2019), and fostering a learning to learn mindset is crucial for long-term educational success.

4.3 Research Questions

The objective of the study was to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Do primary school English language teachers integrate metacognitive strategy instruction approaches into their teaching practices?

RQ2: How does teachers' metacognitive awareness influence their application of implicit and explicit instructional approaches in the primary EFL classroom?

The first research question examines whether teachers choose metacognitive teaching approaches and instruction in diverse primary EFL classrooms.
The significance of metacognitive strategy instruction is highlighted by recent research on young learners' cognitive development. Traditionally, it was believed that metacognitive abilities do not develop until middle childhood (ages 7-10) (Flavell, 1979; Veenman et al., 2006). However, emerging research challenges this assumption, demonstrating that children as young as three can engage in metacognitive thinking, particularly in collaborative learning contexts (Whitebread et al., 2007; Shamir et al., 2009).
Whitebread et al. (2007) observed over 1,400 preschool-aged children and found that metacognitive behaviours emerged naturally when children engaged in group discussions, problem-solving, and independent exploration. Similarly, Shamir et al. (2009) demonstrated

that peer-assisted learning enhances young children's ability to regulate their thinking, reinforcing the role of social interaction in metacognitive development.
Capperucci (2017) highlights the importance of reflection in primary education, arguing that "metacognitive reflection allows children to analyse their own thought processes, facilitating deeper language learning" (Capperucci, 2017:216). This aligns with findings that young learners require structured guidance to develop metacognitive awareness (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986; Coyle, Valcárcel, 2002).
Ellis and Ibrahim (2019:10) argue that "even very young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge and ability that they are rarely given credit for" and emphasize that explicit teaching can enhance metacognitive development in EFL learners.
Given these findings, it is crucial to investigate how primary school English teachers integrate metacognitive strategies into their instructional choices, particularly in the mixed-ability class where students vary in linguistic proficiency, learning styles, and self-regulation skills.

The second research question investigates how primary school English teachers approach metacognitive instruction—whether through explicit teaching (direct strategy instruction) or implicit teaching (integrated within learning activities)—or whether they opt for teacher-centred or student-centred, focusing on socially mediated approaches such as peer cooperation or tutoring in their instruction.
This research question aims to explore whether primary school English teachers prioritize explicit or implicit metacognitive instruction in their teaching of young learners based on their own language strategy use and experience. Understanding these factors will also provide insight into how young learners develop metacognitive awareness through structured classroom interactions.

4.4 Questionnaire design

A quantitative research design was selected for this case study, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data on teachers' personal use of LLS, their planned classroom strategies, and demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was designed to capture metacognitive awareness, adaptability, and correlations between personal metacognitive learning strategies and teaching practices and approaches in a 'hypothetical' EFL 4th/5th grade Italian primary classroom.
The instrument consists of three main sections:

1. Demographic Variables – Collecting background information to explore potential correlations with LLS use.
2. Personal Use of LLS – Investigating participants' self-reported use of metacognitive learning strategies-planning, monitoring, and evaluation- in their own language learning.
3. Classroom Application of metacognitive strategies – Examining teachers' anticipated use and instruction of metacognitive strategies in through the perspective of the mixed-ability class through scenario-based questions.

The first section of the questionnaire gathers demographic and background information about participants, drawing on the LEAP-Q questionnaire (Marian et al., 2007; 2020) It includes questions on age, gender, education level, and linguistic background, assessing both native and additional language proficiency across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, it gathers information on teaching experience, including whether participants are currently or

have previously taught in preschool or primary school settings, as well as experience in other educational contexts.

The second and third part of the questionnaire employs a two-stage methodological approach, drawing on Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL)—specifically its metacognitive strategy components—with vignette-based experimental design. This approach examines how teachers' personal reported use of metacognitive strategies influences their pedagogical decisions in the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC) perspective.

Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learners* (SILL) is a widely employed instrument both domestically and internationally to examine the strategy use of language learners world-wide. This instrument has been assessed for validity and reliability several times (Woodrow,2005 :91)

Oxford's SILL categorizes language learning strategies into six domains, but for this research's purpose, only the metacognitive strategy section was drawn upon as a source for inspiration to create this part of the questionnaire. Metacognitive strategies involve:

- Planning (e.g., setting language learning goals, organizing study schedules)
- Monitoring (e.g., noticing comprehension gaps, self-correcting)
- Evaluating (e.g., reflecting on learning effectiveness, adjusting methods accordingly)

Participants complete a strategy-use questionnaire, rating and reporting the frequency of their metacognitive language learning strategy use—from never (1) to always (5)—across six different areas. For instance, within the 'Planning' section, some items focused on goal setting, while others addressed study organization and learning strategies. This data serves as a baseline for comparing participants' instructional decision-making in the vignettes.

Following the strategy use questionnaire, participants will evaluate scenario-based teaching vignettes designed to simulate 'real-world' EFL classroom challenges and opportunities within a MAC perspective. That is, each vignette/scenario presents a teaching situation that requires differentiation and leveraging of various instructional strategies to address diverse learner needs.

Each vignette scenario provides options that align with different instructional approaches, including explicit and implicit metacognitive instruction, more teacher-centred approaches, and more socially collaborative approaches (Coded as ET, IT, TC and PT in analysis). These distinctions allow for an analysis of how teachers apply metacognitive teaching strategies in their classrooms.

4.5 Instructional approaches

The following 4 sections provide a detailed description of each instructional approach, outlining their key characteristics and theoretical basis.

1.Explicit Metacognitive Instruction: The teacher directly models, explains, or prompts strategic thinking, such as guiding students in self-monitoring or planning learning activities. This structured approach involves direct demonstration, clear explanations, and explicit prompts to encourage strategy use, fostering students' ability to actively regulate their learning

2.Implicit Metacognitive Instruction: The teacher integrates metacognitive stragies indirectly, embedding self-assessment and reflection within learning tasks without explicitly naming or

instructing students on these strategies. Research suggests that implicit instruction is most effective once students have already received explicit strategy training. As Dignath and Veenman (2020:6) state, “students first have to be trained in self-regulation strategies explicitly in order to benefit from implicit instruction and modelling”.

3.Teacher-Centred Instruction (TC): This approach positions the teacher as the primary source of knowledge and control over learning activities. It is characterized by structured, instructor-led lessons where the teacher directs the learning process, sets goals, and monitors student progress. While this method ensures structured learning, it may limit student autonomy and engagement.

4.Social/Collaborative Mediated Learning Approaches: These methods emphasize peer interaction, discussion, and joint problem-solving as integral components of learning as well as peer teaching. Hattie (2012:187) highlights the benefits of peer teaching, stating, “When students become teachers of others, they learn as much as those they are teaching”. This reciprocal learning process fosters higher-order thinking and metacognitive engagement, encouraging students to take a more active role in their learning.
Additionally, an option for participants to freely integrate further comments was also included in the questionnaire

By analysing teachers’ instructional choices across these categories, this research aims to explore how metacognitive awareness influences teaching strategies in the mixed-ability class. The decision to use vignettes in this study was driven by the need to minimize response bias associated with direct survey questioning. Instead of relying solely on self-reported attitudes and approaches, vignettes provide contextualized scenarios that encourage more authentic, behaviourally driven responses, leading to greater reliability in measuring instructional choices.
As Verneuer-Emre, Eifler and Dülmer (2022:133) explain:
“The term ‘vignette analysis’ draws on various disciplinary traditions to refer to various techniques for measuring normative judgments, subjective beliefs, and behavioural intentions on the basis of respondents’ answers to (a number of) brief descriptions of hypothetical situations, persons, or objects.”
“The narrative vignette is a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time. The moment-to-moment style of description in a narrative vignette gives the reader a sense of being there in the scene.” (Erickson, 1986: 150)

4.6 Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate Primary Education students, including both pre-service and in-service primary school teachers, who voluntarily expressed interest in taking part in the research. (see ANNEX 1)

- Pre-service teachers are enrolled in teacher training programs and may have limited classroom experience.
- In-service teachers have practical teaching experience.

4.6.1 Participant Demographics and Educational Background

The study sample consisted of 25 participants enrolled in an undergraduate Primary Education degree course at an Italian university. 6 participants were excluded from data analysis since they did not complete the activities included in the present study.
This group represents a diverse range of educators with varying levels of teaching experience and educational backgrounds.
Among the participants, 89.5% identify as female, while 10.5% are male.

Age range	Percentage (%)
20-23 years	26.3
24-30 years	10.5
31-40 years	21.1
41-50 years	36.8
50+ years	5.3

Table 1 - Age

In terms of age distribution, the largest group (36.8%) falls within the 41-50 years range, with smaller proportions representing younger and older educators.

Education level	Percentage (%)
High School Diploma or Equivalent	36.8
Bachelor's	47.4
Master's Degree	15.8

Table 2 - Formal Education Background

Regarding formal education, 36.8% of participants hold a High School Diploma or equivalent, while the remainder have earned bachelor's or master's degrees in various disciplines, predominantly in education-related fields. (see Table 2)

Teaching experience	Percentage (%)
Currently Teaching	57.9
Not Currently Teaching	42.1

Table 3 – Currently Teaching

Years of experience	Percentage (%)
No experience	42.5
0-1 years	10.3
1-2 years	10.3
3-4 years	5.3
Over 5 years	31.6

Table 4 - Primary School Teaching Experience

Years of experience	Percentage (%)
Never taught	73.7
0-1 year	21
3-4 years	5.3

Table 5 - Preschool Teaching Experience

Other teaching experience	Percentage (%)
Taught in Lower/Upper Secondary or Private Schools	42.1
No additional teaching experience	57.9

Table 6 - Other Teaching Experience

As can be seen, 57.9%) of participants (are currently teaching, primarily in primary school settings (see Table 3). Teaching experience varies, with 31.6% having over five years in primary education, while 42.5% reported no experience at this level (see Table 4). Most participants (73.7%) have never taught in a preschool, whereas 21% have 0-1 year of experience (see Table 5). Additionally, 42.1% have taught in lower/upper secondary or private schools, while 57.9% reported no additional teaching experience beyond primary or preschool settings (see Table 6).

Upper secondary school type	Percentage (%)
Liceo delle Scienze Umane (Human Sciences High School)	31.6

Liceo Scientifico (Scientific High School)	15.8
Liceo Linguistico (Language High School)	10.5
Istituto Tecnico (Technical Institute)	10.5
Istituto Professionale (Vocational Institute)	10.5
Liceo Classico	15.8
Istituto statale d'arte	5.3

Table 7 - Upper Secondary School Background

Participants attended a diverse range of upper secondary schools, reflecting different academic backgrounds. The most common type of secondary school was the Liceo delle Scienze Umane (Human Sciences High School), attended by 31.6% of participants. (see Table 7)

Native Language	Percentage (%)
Italian	94.7
Italian and Friulano (Bilingual)	5.3

Table 8 - Native Language Distribution

Foreign Language	Percentage (%)
English	100.0
French	42
Friulan	21.0
German	16.0
Spanish	10.0

Table 9 - Foreign Language Knowledge

All participants (100%) reported Italian as their native language, with 5%of the sample identified as bilingual in Italian and Friulan. (see Table 8)
In addition to Italian, all participants reported knowledge of English (100%) as a foreign language. Other reported additional foreign languages include:

- French – 42%
- Friulano – 21%
- German – 16%
- Spanish – 10% (see Table 9)

4.6.1.1 Language Proficiency Levels

Participants were asked to report their level of proficiency in the languages they know. (see Tables 9-12 below).

English

ENGLISH	***Proficiency Level***				
Skill/scale	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	Grand Total
Writing	2	10	2	2	16
Speaking	5	6	3	2	16
Listening	2	8	3	3	16
Reading	2	6	5	3	16
Grand Total	11	30	13	10	64

Table 9. Reported proficiency of English according to skill

The dataset includes proficiency ratings for English across four skills (Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Reading). 16 participants provided responses regarding their proficiency level in English. Although reporting their knowledge of English ,2 participants did not report their proficiency level leading to only 16 total results.
The dataset above (table 9) includes 64 responses reporting English language proficiency in writing, speaking, listening, and reading, with proficiency levels ranging from 1 (beginner) to 4 (advanced).
-Speaking is the weakest skill, with the highest number of participants reporting Level 1 (5responses) and only 2 at Level 4.
-Writing is mostly at Level 2 (10 out of 16 responses), indicating basic proficiency but not complete weakness.
-Listening is mostly at Level 2 (8 out of 16 responses) and reading is mostly at Level 2 (6 out of 16 responses) show a more balanced distribution, with participants spread across all levels, though reading has slightly stronger ratings.
-Only10 participants reported Level 4 in any skill, suggesting that overall English proficiency remains moderate.

French

FRENCH	***Proficiency Level***				
Skill	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	Grand Total
Writing	3	4	1	1	9
Speaking	3	3	2	1	9
Listening	3	3	2	1	9
Reading	2	2	4	1	9
Total	11	12	9	4	36

Table 10. Reported proficiency of French according to skill

9 participants reported their proficiency in French. The dataset above (Table 10) includes 36 responses reporting French language proficiency in writing, speaking, listening, and reading, with proficiency levels ranging from 1 (beginner) to 4 (advanced).
- Level 2 is the most frequently reported proficiency level (12 responses), followed by Level 1 (11 responses), Level 3 (9 responses), and Level 4 (4 responses).
-Writing and Speaking are the most reported skills (9 responses each), with most participants rating themselves at Level 2 (4 responses in Writing, 3 in Speaking).
-Listening and Speaking show similar trends, with Level 2 as the most common proficiency level.
-Reading shows the strongest distribution at Level 3 (4 responses), while Level 4 is the least frequent across all skills.
-Few participants reported high proficiency (Level 4), suggesting that overall, French proficiency remains at beginner or intermediate levels.

German

GERMAN	***Proficiency Level***				
Skill	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	Grand Total
Writing	3	0	1	0	4
Speaking	3	0	1	0	4
Listening	2	1	1	0	4
Reading	1	2	1	0	4
Grand Total	9	3	4	0	16

Table 11. Reported proficiency of German according to skill
4 participants reported their proficiency in German. The dataset above (Table 11) includes 16 responses reporting German language proficiency in writing, speaking, listening, and reading, with proficiency levels ranging from 1 (beginner) to 4 (advanced).
-No participants reported Level 4 proficiency in any skill, indicating an overall lack of advanced proficiency in German. Level 1 is the most frequently reported proficiency level (9 responses), followed by Level 3 (4 responses) and Level 2 (3 responses).

-Writing and Speaking have the same distribution, with Level 1 (3 responses) being the most common and only one participant reaching Level 3.
-Listening and Reading show slightly more variation, with at least one participant at each level except Level 4.
-Overall, the data suggests that the majority of participants have beginner-level proficiency in German, with very few reaching intermediate levels

Friulian

FRIULIAN	***Proficiency Level***				
Skill	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	Total
Writing	1	2	0	1	4
Speaking	0	1	2	1	4
Listening	0	1	1	2	4
Reading	0	1	2	1	4
Grand Total	1	5	5	5	16

Table 12. Reported proficiency of Friulian according to skill
4 participants reported their proficiency in Friulian. The dataset above (Table 12) includes 16 responses reporting Friulian language proficiency in writing, speaking, listening, and reading, with proficiency levels ranging from 1 (beginner) to 4 (advanced).

- Level 3 is the most commonly reported proficiency level (5 responses), followed by Levels 2 and 4 (5 responses each).
-No participants reported Level 1 proficiency across most skills.
-Speaking and Reading are the strongest reported skills, with 3 responses in Speaking (including 1 at Level 4) and 2 responses in Reading at Level 3.
-Writing appears to be the weakest skill, with only 2 responses at Level 2 and none at Level 3.
-Listening is slightly stronger than Writing, with 1 response at Level 3 and 1 at Level 4.

To sum up, self-reported proficiency levels across English, French, German, and Friulian reveal varying degrees of competence. Overall, English is the most widely used language, while French and German remain at intermediate or beginner levels. Friulian is spoken more fluently than it is written, suggesting that it is primarily acquired through oral communication. These findings highlight the participants' strong multilingual competencies, particularly in English and French, with varying degrees of proficiency in German and Friulian.

Questionnaire and Data Collection procedure
To ensure accessibility and ease of participation, the questionnaire was prepared on Google Forms and administered electronically, allowing respondents to complete the survey at their convenience. The link to the questionnaire was sent participants who provided consent via a Google Form. (questionnaire see ANNEX 2). All participants provided informed consent. Data underwent a pseudonymization procedure.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the collected data in response to the case study's research questions. The results are organized according to the research questions, providing a structured overview. Data analysis was conducted on Excel.

5.1 RQ1: Do primary school English language teachers integrate metacognitive strategy instruction approaches into their teaching practices?

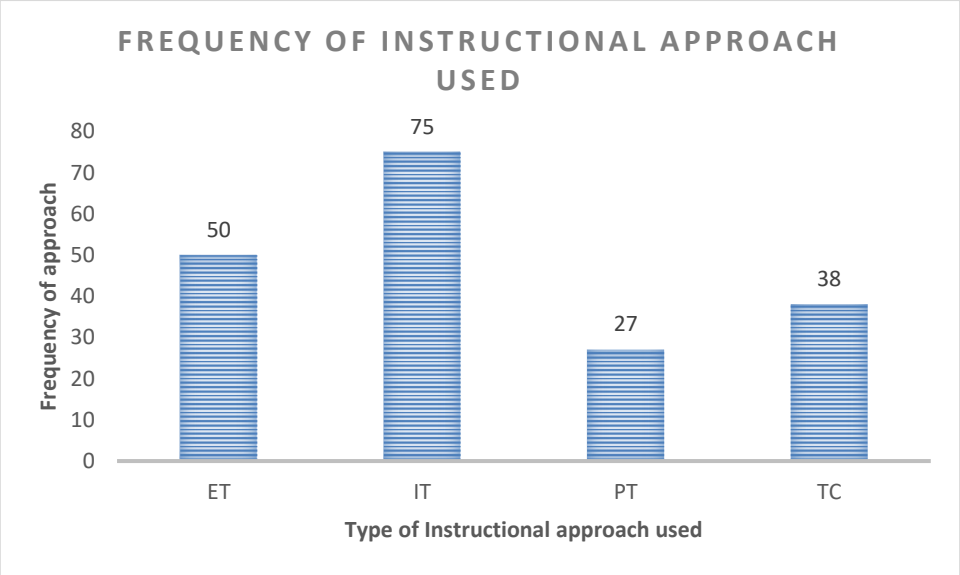

Figure 1 - Teaching approaches used in class

Participants were presented with ten classroom scenarios and asked to select instructional strategies categorized as explicit, implicit, teacher-centred, or socially mediated approaches. The responses were analysed by counting the frequency of each instructional approach, where ET means Explicit Teaching, IT means Implicit Teaching, TC means Teacher-centred approach and PT means socially mediated approach. (see Figure 1)
Implicit Teaching (IT) was used most frequently, with 75 instances across all scenarios.
Explicit Teaching (ET) was used 50 times making it the second most common strategy.
Teacher-Centred (TC) approaches were used 38 times across all responses.
Socially Mediated (PT) approaches were the least used, selected 27 times

The highest frequencies of each instructional approach will be explained below:

5.1.1 Explicitly Teaching Metacognitive Strategies (ET)

Explicit teaching metacognitive strategies was selected most frequently in:

Scenario	ET responses (absolute frequencies)
Scenario 10: Encouraging Reflection "Your students have varied success with their study habits, and some struggle to identify what works best for them. How would you encourage reflection?"	14
Scenario 6: Monitoring Understanding "During a listening task, some students quickly identify and resolve misunderstandings, while others struggle to recognize when they're stuck. How would you help all students monitor their understanding?"	10
Scenario 1: Planning Speaking Activities "Some of your students struggle to find things to say during speaking practice. How would you help them plan their speaking activities?"	5

Figure 2. Scenarios indicating most frequent selection of Explicitly Teaching Metacognitive Strategies (ET)

The selection of explicit metacognitive strategies ranged from 2 (lowest) to 14 (highest). Additionally, ET was not used at all in Scenario 4 and Scenario 5, indicating that teachers did not apply explicit metacognitive strategy instruction in all teaching situations.
The table above presents the scenarios where explicit metacognitive strategies were most frequently selected. The highest selection occurred in:

-Scenario 10 (14 responses): Encouraging reflection on study habits.

-Scenario 6 (10 responses): Helping students monitor their understanding during listening tasks.

-Scenario 1 (5 responses): Assisting students in planning their speaking activities.

These results indicate that teachers tend to use explicit instruction more frequently when guiding students in reflective practices, self-monitoring, and structured planning.

5.1.2 Implicitly Teaching Metacognitive Strategies (IT)

Scenario	IT responses(absolute frequency)
Scenario 4: Engaging students "Your students enjoy engaging with multimedia resources. How would you incorporate these into their language learning?"	17
Scenario 5: Organizing learning "In your class, some students struggle to keep track of vocabulary and grammar they are learning, while others are more independent. How would you help all students organize their learning?"	14
Scenario 2: Prioritizing learning "Your students have different levels of ability and struggle to focus on specific skills during language activities. How would you help them prioritize their learning?"	9

Figure 3. Scenarios indicating most frequent selection of Implicitly Teaching Metacognitive Strategies (IT) Instruction approach

The selection of Implicit Teaching (IT) ranged from 4 (lowest) to 17 (highest). Additionally, IT was not used at all in Scenario 10, suggesting that teachers did not apply implicit metacognitive strategy instruction in every teaching situation. The table above, (Figure 3), highlights the scenarios where implicit metacognitive strategies were most frequently chosen by participants. The highest choices were:

-Scenario 4 (17 responses): Incorporating multimedia resources into language learning.

-Scenario 5 (14 responses): Helping students organize their vocabulary and grammar learning.

-Scenario 2 (9 responses): Supporting students in prioritizing their learning tasks.

These findings suggest that implicit instruction is often used when guiding students through self-directed and resource-based learning strategies.

5.1.3 Teacher-Centred Approach (TC)

Scenario	TC responses(absolute frequency)
Scenario 7: Adjusting strategies "A group of students is struggling to make progress in speaking fluency. How would you help them adjust their strategies?"	8
Scenario 9: Evaluating progress "After a speaking task, students of different abilities need to evaluate their performance and progress. How would you facilitate this?"	8
Scenario 8: Seeking feedback "In your class, students vary in their ability to seek and use feedback effectively during speaking tasks. How would you encourage them to ask for and use feedback to improve their speaking skills?"	6

Figure 4. Scenarios indicating most frequent selection of Teacher-Centred Approach (TC)

The selection of Teacher-centred (TC) ranged from 2 (lowest) to 8 (highest). TC was not used at all in Scenario 2 and Scenario 5, indicating that teachers did not apply control-oriented instructional strategies in every teaching context. The table (Figure 4) above presents the scenarios where participants most frequently selected teacher-centred approaches. The highest selections occurred in:

-Scenario 7 (8 responses): Helping students adjust their speaking fluency strategies.

-Scenario 9 (8 responses): Facilitating evaluation of speaking performance and progress.

-Scenario 8 (6 responses): Encouraging students to seek and use feedback effectively.

These findings indicate that teacher-centred approaches are most commonly used when direct guidance, structured instruction, and explicit feedback are needed, particularly in developing speaking fluency and performance evaluation.

5.1.4 Socially Mediated Approach (PT)

Scenario	No. PT responses
Scenario 3: Goal setting "You want to help students set achievable goals for speaking practice. How would you incorporate goal setting into your lesson?"	6
Scenario 1: Planning activities "Some of your students struggle to find things to say during speaking practice. How would you help them plan their speaking activities?"	5
Scenario 2: Prioritizing learning "Your students have different levels of ability and struggle to focus on specific skills during language activities. How would you help them prioritize their learning?"	5

Figure 5. Frequency of Socially Mediated Approach (PT) Selections

The selection of Socially Mediated Approaches (PT) ranged from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). PT was not used at all in Scenario 4 and Scenario 7. The table (Figure 5) above shows that a socially mediated approach was most frequently selected in:

-Scenario 3 (6 responses): Incorporating goal-setting strategies into speaking lessons.
-Scenario 1 (5 responses): Supporting students in planning their speaking activities.
-Scenario 2 (5 responses): Helping students prioritize their learning strategies.

This approach was rarely chosen in other scenarios, suggesting that socially mediated approaches are used primarily in collaborative goal-setting, planning, and prioritization of learning tasks rather than in more interaction driven instructional contexts.

5.2 RQ2: How does teachers' metacognitive awareness influence their application of implicit and explicit instructional approaches in the primary EFL classroom?

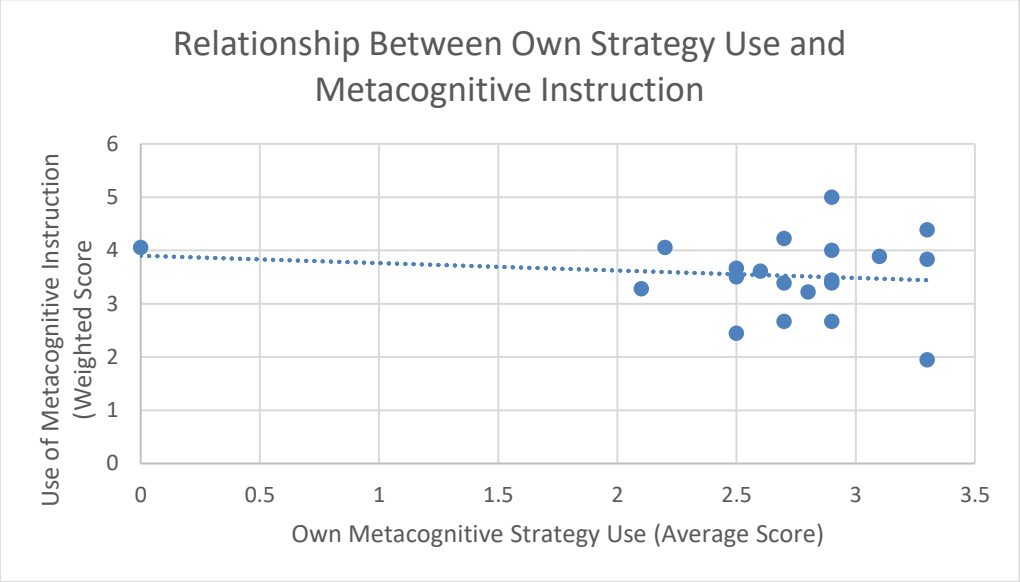

Figure 7 - Scatter Plot: Relationship Between Own Strategy Use and Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

Procedure for analysis

To analyse the relationship between teachers' own use of metacognitive strategies in language learning and their use of metacognitive instruction (preferences for explicit, implicit instruction or teacher-centred or socially mediated approaches) in teaching, the following steps and calculations were carried out:

1. For Variable 1: Own Use of Metacognitive Strategies in Language Learning
   -Participants completed 18 questions rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always)to assess how frequently they apply metacognitive strategies in their own language learning.

A mean score was calculated for each participant's responses to represent their overall personal metacognitive strategy use.

Each question was rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).
For each participant, their individual responses to all 18 questions were added together.
The sum of the 18 responses was then divided by 18 (the total number of questions) to obtain the mean score.

2.For Variable 2: Data from scenarios and choice of instructional approach
Data from participants who evaluated 10 classroom scenarios, each presenting different instructional strategies was categorized as follows:

Explicit (ET) = 4 = Direct/explicit instruction, modelling, and structured guidance.
Implicit (IT) = 3 = Indirect/implicit guidance, where strategies are embedded within tasks.

Teacher-Centred (TC) = 2 =Instructor-led, with limited student autonomy.
Socially Mediated (PT) = 1 = Collaborative, peer-supported learning.

For each participant's response how many times they used each instruction type in the 10 scenarios was quantified.
After the frequencies of each instructional strategy was quantified, the weighted formula was applied to calculate a participant's overall instructional preference score.

5.2.1 Correlation analysis

The calculation of the correlation was then carried out between the two variables- own personal metacognitive strategy use (mean score) and instructional preference a (weighted score) to assess the linear relationship.
The result, r =0.0318 indicates a weak correlation, meaning there is no strong association between teachers' personal metacognitive strategies and how they apply them in teaching. (Agresti, Franklin, 2013:105)

A scatter plot (Figure 7) was created to visualize the relationship between teachers' metacognitive awareness in learning (X-axis) and their application of metacognitive strategies in teaching (Y-axis). The line remains almost flat indicating that an increase in metacognitive awareness does not strongly predict an increase in metacognitive instruction and the points are widely scattered. On the basis of dispersion of points and the absence of a clear linear trend in the plot this aligns with the weak correlation findings, suggesting no clear predictive relationship between the two variables. (Agresti, Franklin, 2013:105).

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 RQ1: Do primary school English language teachers integrate metacognitive strategy instruction approaches into their teaching practices?

The analysis of strategy instructional used by primary school English language teachers suggests that metacognitive strategy instruction is present in classrooms but is applied in varied ways depending on the teaching context. Teachers demonstrated a preference for implicit instructional methods, while explicit teaching and teacher-centred strategies were also present, albeit to a lesser extent. The lowest frequency was observed in socially mediated approaches.

Preference for Implicit Teaching Strategies

With 39.47% of responses selecting Implicit Teaching (IT), it is evident that teachers tend to embed metacognitive instruction indirectly rather than explicitly teaching students how to

regulate their learning. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of scaffolded learning and indirect guidance in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Instead of direct instruction, teachers appear to encourage learning through structured exposure, modelling, and implicit cues, as seen in scenarios involving multimedia resources (Scenario 4- *"Your students enjoy engaging with multimedia resources. How would you incorporate these into their language learning?"*) and vocabulary tracking (Scenario 5- *In your class, some students struggle to keep track of vocabulary and grammar they are learning, while others are more independent. How would you help all students organize their learning?*).

Additionally, this preference for implicit over explicit instruction could be linked to the developmental progression of metacognitive strategy instruction, where explicit teaching is emphasized in early learning stages, followed by a shift toward implicit instruction as students gain autonomy. Dignath and Veenman (2020:7) argue that *"students first have to be trained in self-regulation strategies explicitly in order to benefit from implicit instruction and modelling"*. This perspective suggests that explicit instruction lays the foundational knowledge necessary for students to later apply metacognitive strategies independently. Ellis and Ibrahim (2019) further reinforce this by highlighting that young learners require structured guidance in the form of explicit metacognitive instruction before they can transition to more autonomous learning behaviours.

Given that the scenarios in this study are set in 4th and 5th grade classrooms, this developmental progression is particularly relevant. At this stage, students are still developing self-regulated learning abilities, and their ability to independently apply metacognitive strategies is not yet fully formed. However, some teachers may believe that children in $4^{th}/5^{th}$ grade are already prepared and therefore implicit strategy instruction is more appropriate. As a result, explicit instruction plays a crucial role in guiding them through structured cognitive engagement, as observed in its frequent use in goal-setting (Scenario 3 *You want to help students set achievable goals for speaking practice. How would you incorporate goal setting into your lesson?*) and monitoring comprehension (Scenario 6 *During a listening task, some students quickly identify and resolve misunderstandings, while others struggle to recognize when they're stuck. How would you help all students monitor their understanding?*).

As learners mature and their metacognitive awareness develops, teachers may gradually incorporate implicit instruction, encouraging students to independently employ strategies they have been explicitly taught. This process is closely related to the concept of scaffolding, where external guidance is progressively reduced as students take more responsibility for their own learning. The findings, therefore, suggest that primary school teachers intuitively follow this developmental model, relying more on explicit instruction in structured learning scenarios, while favouring implicit methods in areas designed to foster autonomy and strategic thinking.

However, while implicit strategies foster autonomous learning, research suggests that explicit instruction may be necessary for developing self-regulation in younger learners (Ellis, Ibrahim,2019). This raises questions about whether the balance between implicit and explicit instruction is optimal for metacognitive skill development. Are teachers using the right proportion of both methods to maximize students' metacognitive skill development?

Explicit Teaching and Its Role in Self-Regulated Learning

Despite the lower frequency compared to implicit instruction, Explicit Teaching (ET) was used in 26.32% of responses, particularly in scenarios that required structured reflection and monitoring, such as:

- Scenario 10 (Study habits, 14 responses)
- Scenario 6 (Listening comprehension, 10 responses)

This suggests that when students need to set goals, monitor comprehension, or reflect on progress, teachers are more inclined to provide direct instruction on metacognitive processes. According to Flavell's (1979) theory of metacognition, explicit instruction in metacognitive skills—such as goal-setting, planning, and self-monitoring—can significantly improve students' ability to regulate their own learning.

Furthermore, research in self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2000) highlights the importance of explicit instruction in helping learners become aware of their own thought processes. The prominence of explicit teaching in goal-setting (Scenario 3) and study habits (Scenario 10) aligns with this, as these tasks require conscious reflection and structured support from educators.

Teacher-centred Approaches and Their Limited Role

A teacher-centred (TC) approach was selected in 20% of responses, most frequently in:

- Scenario 7 (Speaking fluency, 8 responses)
- Scenario 9 (Evaluation of performance, 8 responses)

This suggests that when it comes to providing structured guidance for performance-based tasks (e.g., speaking fluency, self-evaluation), teachers may revert to traditional, authoritative instruction. While direct teacher guidance can offer clear direction, research suggests that over-reliance on teacher-centred approaches especially when linked to reinforcement can limit students' development of autonomous learning strategies (Cardona,2001 in Caon,2016).

Notably, Scenario 2 ("Your students have different levels of ability and struggle to focus on specific skills during language activities. How would you help them prioritize their learning?") had no TC selections, indicating that teachers do not perceive prioritization as something that should be dictated by the teacher. Instead, they rely on implicit or socially mediated strategies, which aligns with theories emphasizing student autonomy in metacognitive skill development.

Limited Use of Socially Mediated Strategies

The least-used approach was Socially Mediated (PT) learning approach (14.21%), with its highest frequency in:

- Scenario 3 (Goal setting, 6 responses)
- Scenario 1 (Speaking practice, 5 responses)

This limited application of socially mediated strategies contrasts with research advocating for collaborative learning environments as a means of enhancing metacognitive development. Peer-assisted learning, peer-teaching and dialogic teaching emphasize the benefits of collaborative reflection, yet findings suggest that teachers do not frequently employ peer-based learning methods for metacognitive strategy instruction. This finding is particularly relevant in the perspective of the Mixed-Ability Class (MAC), where social mediation plays a critical role in fostering both cognitive and social growth.

Caon (2016) argues that effective metacognitive instruction in the MAC should emphasize cooperation, structured peer feedback, and dialogic interactions that help students co-construct knowledge. The MAC perspective promotes methodologies that prioritize active student participation rather than passive information reception, highlighting the importance of peer scaffolding, collaborative problem-solving, and cooperative learning structures. As research

suggests, peer learning enhances linguistic, social, and metacognitive competencies by engaging students in horizontal, rather than vertical, forms of knowledge construction. This contrasts with the findings of the present study, where teachers relied more heavily on teacher-centred methods rather than fostering student-led, socially mediated metacognitive instruction. Furthermore, the MAC perspective aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the importance of scaffolding within peer interactions. According to Caon (2016), peer-mediated learning within the ZPD allows students to engage with metacognitive strategies at varying levels, supporting weaker learners while encouraging autonomy in more advanced students. However, the relatively low use of socially mediated strategies found in this study suggests that teachers may not be fully leveraging the benefits of peer collaboration to enhance metacognitive awareness.

By integrating a more socially mediated approach to metacognitive strategy instruction, teachers in a MAC can create inclusive environments that cater to diverse learner needs. Strategies such as peer tutoring, structured group discussions, and cooperative goal-setting activities may help bridge the gap between teacher-led instruction and student-centred metacognitive development. Future research could explore how teachers can be supported in implementing these approaches effectively within the MAC.

Implications for Metacognitive Strategy Instruction in EFL Classrooms

The data suggests that while primary school English teachers do integrate metacognitive strategy instruction, the approach varies depending on the nature of the learning task:

- Implicit instruction is preferred for tasks requiring gradual skill development and exposure.
- Explicit instruction is used when students need to set goals, reflect, and regulate their learning.
- Teacher-centred approaches remain in use but are limited to performance-based tasks.
- Socially mediated approaches are underused, suggesting a potential gap in collaborative metacognitive instruction.

Given these trends, future training initiatives could focus on helping teachers balance implicit and explicit instruction while incorporating more peer-based learning strategies to foster metacognitive development. Encouraging greater use of collaborative reflection techniques—such as peer feedback and think-aloud activities—could enhance students' ability to regulate their own learning in a supportive environment.

5.3.2 RQ2 How does teachers' metacognitive awareness influence their application of implicit and explicit instructional approaches in the primary EFL classroom?

The analysis of primary school English language teachers' metacognitive awareness and their instructional approaches reveals a complex relationship between personal strategy use and classroom practice. While metacognitive awareness is often considered a fundamental component of effective instruction, the correlation between teachers' self-reported use of metacognitive strategies in language learning and their application of metacognitive strategies in teaching in a primary school foreign language classroom was found to be weak.

Correlation Between Teachers' Metacognitive Awareness and Instructional Approaches

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.0318) indicates a very weak correlation between teachers' own metacognitive strategy use and their application of metacognitive instruction in the classroom.

This finding challenges the assumption that teachers who demonstrate higher metacognitive awareness in their own learning will automatically transfer these skills into their teaching. While previous research (Hartman, 2001) suggests that metacognitively aware teachers are more effective at planning, monitoring, and evaluating their instruction, the weak correlation observed in this study implies that other contextual factors may influence the application of metacognitive strategies in classroom instruction.

One possible explanation is that while teachers may possess strong metacognitive skills in their own learning, their instructional practices are influenced by external constraints such as curriculum requirements, school policies, and student expectations. This is consistent with research by Smith-Ferguson (2020:11), who noted that the possibility to provide children with extensive opportunities and exposure to metacognitive strategies was limited.

Preference for Implicit Instruction Despite Awareness of Metacognition

Despite the weak correlation, the data suggests that teachers of our sample tend to favour implicit instructional approaches in the classroom. Implicit Teaching (IT) accounted for 39.47% of the responses, making it the most frequently used teaching approach. In contrast, Explicit Teaching (ET) was selected in only 26.32% of cases, while Teacher-centred (TC) and Socially Mediated (PT) strategies were even less common at 20% and 14.21%, respectively.

This preference for implicit instruction aligns with sociocultural perspectives on learning, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolded instruction. Teachers may rely on implicit strategies—such as modelling, guided practice, and indirect prompts—because these approaches facilitate learning through structured exposure rather than direct explanation.

However, this trend contradicts findings from research emphasizing the importance of explicit instruction in the early stages of metacognitive development. Dignath and Veenman (2020) argue that explicit instruction is necessary for students to first acquire self-regulation strategies, after which implicit methods can be used to reinforce them. In particular, primary school students, such as those in 4th and 5th grade classrooms, may benefit more from structured guidance before transitioning to autonomous strategy use.

Weak Presence of Socially Mediated Strategies

Another key finding is the low use of Socially Mediated (PT) instructional approaches, which accounted for just 14.21% of the responses. This contrasts with research advocating for collaborative learning environments as a means of enhancing metacognitive development.

Peer-assisted learning, peer teaching and dialogic teaching and learning emphasize the benefits of collaborative reflection, yet findings suggest that teachers in this study do not frequently employ peer-based learning approaches for metacognitive strategy instruction. The MAC supports the idea that metacognitive learning is enhanced through interactive dialogue and structured group activities. The limited use of socially mediated strategies suggests a possible

underutilization of collaborative techniques that could otherwise support students in developing metacognitive awareness through peer engagement.

The Role of Teacher Education and Professional Development

The weak correlation between teachers' personal metacognitive awareness and instructional application suggests a potential gap in teacher training programs. A key finding in Su-Bergil's (2020:169) study was the effectiveness of micro-teaching in helping student teachers bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Micro-teaching provides opportunities for reflection, peer feedback, and iterative improvement, allowing educators to refine their instructional strategies in a controlled, supportive environment. Given that teachers in this study did not strongly correlate their own metacognitive awareness with their instructional choices, it suggests that without practical application and reflective teaching opportunities, metacognitive awareness alone is insufficient for fostering effective metacognitive strategy instruction. Research further highlights that teacher self-reflection plays a critical role in bridging this gap. According to Hartman (2001:149), effective teachers engage in structured self-regulation cycles, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation, which helps them adapt their instructional methods based on student needs.
However, many educators struggle with reflective practice, and novice teachers, in particular, may require explicit instruction on how to integrate metacognitive strategies into their teaching. Studies on expert versus novice teachers have shown that experienced educators are more adept at adapting instructional strategies based on real-time observations, whereas novice teachers tend to rely more rigidly on pre-planned methods suggesting that experience may influence strategy instruction.

Implications for Classroom Practice

The findings suggest several implications for instructional design and teacher training:

- Balancing explicit and implicit approaches

While implicit instruction is valuable, explicit teaching should not be overlooked, especially for younger learners in primary school settings. Teachers should aim for a progressive instructional model where explicit instruction is used to establish foundational metacognitive skills before transitioning to implicit methods.

- Encouraging socially mediated learning

Collaborative activities, such as peer discussions and cooperative problem-solving, should be integrated more frequently to enhance metacognitive awareness through social interaction. The MAC highlights the effectiveness of interactive dialogue in strengthening students' self-regulation skills.

- Bridging the gap between theory and practice

Teacher education programs should incorporate more practical training on how to apply metacognitive instruction in real classroom scenarios. This can include micro-teaching, peer observation, and structured self-reflection exercises to help teachers transition from theoretical understanding to practical implementation.

- Enhancing teacher reflection and adaptation

Professional development should emphasize reflective teaching practices, helping educators become more aware of how their instructional choices influence student learning. Scaffolded

reflection models could be introduced, guiding teachers in self-monitoring their instructional approaches and adjusting them based on student needs.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the integration of metacognitive strategy instruction in primary EFL classrooms, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may have influenced the findings. These limitations not only highlight areas where caution is needed when interpreting the results but also point to potential directions for future research.

One notable limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported survey responses. While self-assessments can provide useful insights into teachers' perceptions and practices, they do not always capture the full complexity of real classroom dynamics. Teachers may unconsciously overestimate or underestimate their use of metacognitive strategies, and their responses may be shaped by social desirability bias—the tendency to present their teaching practices in a more favourable light. Future research could complement self-reported data with classroom observations, lesson recordings, or think-aloud protocols, allowing researchers to compare teachers' stated practices with their actual instructional behaviours. This would provide a more nuanced and objective understanding of how metacognitive strategies are applied in authentic teaching contexts.

Another limitation lies in the size and scope of the participant pool. The study focused specifically on primary school EFL teachers, which means that the findings may not necessarily be applicable to teachers working in secondary or tertiary education. Given that metacognitive strategy instruction is relevant at all educational levels, future studies could extend this research to different teaching contexts, exploring whether older students receive different types of metacognitive instruction and whether teachers at different levels show variations in their approach to explicit and implicit metacognitive teaching. Expanding the sample size across different age groups, school settings, and geographic regions would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive picture of metacognitive strategy instruction across diverse learning environments.

Additionally, this study did not extensively examine the institutional and curricular constraints that might impact how teachers apply metacognitive strategies in their classrooms. School policies, standardized curricula, time constraints, and administrative expectations often dictate how much flexibility teachers have in implementing explicit or socially mediated metacognitive instruction. If teachers feel pressured to cover a set curriculum within strict time limits, they may prioritize content delivery over metacognitive skill development, regardless of their personal beliefs about its importance. Future research could adopt qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or case studies to explore how school environments and institutional structures shape teachers' decision-making regarding metacognitive strategy instruction. These approaches would allow for a deeper exploration of the challenges teachers face and provide insights into how systemic changes could support the integration of metacognitive instruction more effectively.

Despite these limitations, this study lays an important foundation for future research. By addressing these gaps, future studies can build upon these findings to develop more effective models for integrating metacognitive strategy instruction into EFL classrooms, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the necessary tools and institutional support to foster autonomous and reflective learners.

CONCLUSION

L'obiettivo di questo studio era di esaminare come gli insegnanti di lingua inglese nella scuola primaria integrano l'insegnamento delle strategie metacognitive nelle loro pratiche didattiche e se la loro consapevolezza metacognitiva personale influenzi le loro scelte didattiche. Attraverso l'analisi delle pratiche e degli approcci riportati dagli insegnanti in diversi scenari didattici, questo studio ha cercato di determinare se e in che misura gli approcci didattici espliciti, impliciti, centrati sull'insegnante/diretti dall'insegnante e metodologie didattiche a mediazione sociale vengano utilizzati nell'istruzione metacognitiva.

Il presente studio di caso non ha confermato l'ipotesi che gli insegnanti con maggiore consapevolezza metacognitiva fossero più propensi a utilizzare un'istruzione metacognitiva e questo mette in discussione le precedenti ipotesi (Hartman, 2001) secondo cui gli insegnanti che hanno consapevolezza e conoscenza delle strategie metacognitive integrerebbero tali strategie nella loro didattica in modo più efficace, implicando la necessità di uno sviluppo professionale più mirato che aiuti a colmare il divario tra consapevolezza e pratica.

L'analisi ha evidenziato una correlazione molto debole tra queste due variabili, suggerendo che la consapevolezza metacognitiva degli insegnanti non predice in modo significativo le loro scelte didattiche. I risultati hanno dimostrato che, sebbene gli insegnanti integrino le strategie didattiche metacognitive, il loro utilizzo è incoerente e spesso dipende dal contesto del compito di apprendimento o attività.

L'approccio più utilizzato è risultato essere la didattica implicita/indiretta, implicando che gli insegnanti preferiscono guidare gli studenti verso l'uso delle strategie in modo indiretto, piuttosto che attraverso un insegnamento esplicito e questo porta benefici ad ogni studente, che può imparare a gestire le strategie più adatte più autonomamente. La didattica esplicita è stata applicata più frequentemente in attività di apprendimento dove si dovevano definire degli obiettivi, monitoraggio della comprensione e autoriflessione, indicando che gli insegnanti riconoscono il valore dell'insegnamento metacognitivo diretto nelle situazioni di apprendimento strutturato.

Inoltre, questo studio ha confermato che le metodologie didattiche a mediazione sociale sono state sottoutilizzate, nonostante i loro benefici documentati nell'apprendimento tra pari e nella riflessione collaborativa. Ciò suggerisce che molti insegnanti potrebbero non valorizzare appieno il potenziale delle interazioni strutturate tra pari per potenziare lo sviluppo metacognitivo nei loro studenti.

Sebbene questo studio abbia confermato che gli insegnanti riconoscono e utilizzano gli approcci e metodi di didattica metacognitiva, ha anche evidenziato lacune nella coerenza e nella sistematicità della loro applicazione. Fattori esterni, come le esigenze del curriculum, i vincoli istituzionali e la formazione pedagogica, potrebbero svolgere un ruolo più significativo nel determinare le pratiche adottate in classe. Ricerche che esaminino l'influenza dei fattori istituzionali e della formazione professionale sulla capacità degli insegnanti di integrare l'istruzione metacognitiva potrebbero offrire ulteriori approfondimenti sugli ostacoli che affrontano e devono gestire.

Studi futuri dovrebbero anche esplorare le ragioni per cui gli insegnanti preferiscono l'istruzione implicita rispetto all'insegnamento metacognitivo esplicito, in particolare nei contesti di inglese come lingua straniera nella scuola primaria.

Inoltre, il risultato interessante della scarsa frequenza dell'utilizzo delle metodologie didattiche a mediazione sociale dovrebbe essere indagato più profondamente. Le attività collaborative,

come discussioni tra pari e problem-solving cooperativo, dovrebbero essere integrate più frequentemente per potenziare la consapevolezza metacognitiva attraverso l'interazione sociale, soprattutto nella prospettiva della classe ad abilità differenziate (CAD), che sottolinea l'efficacia del dialogo interattivo nel rafforzare le capacità di autoregolazione di tutti gli studenti in un contesto inclusivo e che tiene conto delle diversità di ogni studente.

Le ricerche future dovrebbero approfondire come i modelli di apprendimento tra pari possano essere integrati in modo più efficace nell'insegnamento metacognitivo. Esplorare le percezioni degli insegnanti, le sfide, opportunità e le possibili soluzioni per l'apprendimento metacognitivo collaborativo potrebbero offrire preziosi contributi al settore. Studi che prevedano osservazioni in classe potrebbero fornire prove più dirette delle pratiche attuate in classe, contribuendo a validare o mettere in discussione i risultati auto-dichiarati.

Lo sviluppo e la formazione professionale dovrebbero dare maggiore enfasi alle pratiche didattiche riflessive, aiutando gli educatori a diventare più consapevoli di come le loro scelte didattiche influenzino l'apprendimento degli studenti. Modelli di riflessione con supporto progressivo (scaffolding) potrebbero essere introdotti per guidare gli insegnanti nell'automonitoraggio delle proprie strategie didattiche e nel loro adattamento in base alle esigenze degli studenti.

In conclusione, questo studio rafforza l'importanza dell'insegnamento delle strategie metacognitive nelle classi di inglese come lingua straniera nella scuola primaria e evidenzia le aree in cui è necessario un maggiore supporto per garantire un'implementazione più consapevole, strutturata e intenzionale. Fornendo agli insegnanti formazione pratica, opportunità strutturate di riflessione e strategie per equilibrare l'applicazione di istruzione implicita ed esplicita, e metodologie didattiche a mediazione sociale gli educatori possono essere meglio preparati ad applicare didattiche metacognitive e promuovere l'apprendimento riflessivo e autoregolato, il pensiero strategico e una maggiore autonomia negli studenti di lingua, nella prospettiva delle classi a abilità differenziate e dell'educazione inclusiva.

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ANNEX 1- CONSENT FORM

Modulo per l'espressione del consenso informato

Strategie di apprendimento, didattica metacognitiva nella Classe Ad Abilità Differenziate (Mixed Ability Classes)

Gentile partecipante,

La ringraziamo per l'interesse mostrato per la nostra ricerca.

Di seguito troverà il Modulo per esprimere il Suo consenso alla partecipazione allo studio "*Strategie di apprendimento, didattica metacognitiva nelle Classi Ad Abilità Differenziate (*Mixed Ability Classes*)*" e l'informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali.

Le chiediamo di leggere attentamente tali documenti.

Dopo aver compilato e inviato questo modulo, la ricercatrice Le invierà via e-mail il link per compilare il questionario previsto dallo studio.

La ringraziamo per il Suo tempo!

Email*……..

Gentile partecipante,

Il presente studio è condotto dalla studentessa Sandra Angela Opack (892845@stud.unive.it), laureanda della Laurea Magistrale in Scienze del Linguaggio sotto la supervisione del Professor Fabio Caon (fabiocaon@unive.it), della Dott.ssa Sveva Battaglia (sveva.battaglia@unive.it) e della dottoranda Karin Zambonati (karin.zambonati@unive.it) del Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali Comparati dell'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia sulla piattaforma online *Google Forms*. Accettando questo modulo, esprime il Suo consenso alla partecipazione allo studio e alle attività in esso incluse.

La partecipazione a questo studio è **volontaria** e potrà decidere di abbandonarlo in qualsiasi momento senza alcun tipo di conseguenza negativa. Esprimendo il Suo consenso, autorizzerà i/le ricercatori/trici ad archiviare in formato digitale ed

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elaborare in maniera confidenziale i Suoi dati personali per l'intera durata del progetto di ricerca. A tutela della Sua privacy, tutti i dati raccolti non saranno mai riconducibili alla Sua persona, in accordo con il codice etico e di condotta dell'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia e con le normative vigenti. I dati verranno trattati in forma anonima in accordo con il Regolamento UE 2016/679 e il Decreto Legislativo n. 196/2003; inoltre, i risultati delle analisi dei dati verranno presentati e pubblicati in tesi, libri o articoli per riviste scientifiche in forma aggregata e anonima. Può richiedere in ogni momento di modificare, rettificare o eliminare il Suo consenso alla partecipazione allo studio e tutti i dati raccolti contattando la responsabile della raccolta dati e/o i supervisori della ricerca.

Le procedure adottate nello studio e i moduli che Le viene chiesto di compilare hanno ricevuto l'approvazione della Commissione Etica di Ateneo in data 05.02.2020, verbale n. 1/2020 (per ulteriori informazioni: commissione.etica@unive.it).

Metodologia di ricerca

Il presente studio è rivolto a soggetti di età superiore ai 18 anni, studenti e studentesse iscritti/e al Corso di Laurea Magistrale a ciclo unico in Scienze della Formazione Primaria.
L'obiettivo principale della ricerca è indagare l'uso delle strategie di apprendimento della lingua inglese da parte degli e delle insegnanti di scuola primaria (sia in formazione che in servizio). Inoltre, si intende analizzare come tali strategie vengano applicate o possano essere integrate nell'insegnamento e nelle attività didattiche in classe in futuro dagli/dalle stessi/e partecipanti allo studio.

Le attività proposte includeranno la compilazione di un questionario online.

Nel questionario verranno chieste alcune informazioni sul/sulla partecipante (ad esempio, la fascia d'età, il genere, il titolo di studio), sul suo profilo linguistico e le eventuali esperienze di insegnamento. Nel questionario ci saranno anche alcune

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domande sull'uso delle strategie di apprendimento utilizzate dal/dalla partecipante durante le proprie esperienze di studio della lingua inglese.

Nel corso del questionario, ci si focalizzerà anche sulle pratiche di insegnamento della lingua inglese, con particolare attenzione all'applicazione di istruzioni strategiche e metalinguistiche nelle attività proposte agli alunni e alle alunne, sia in contesti attuali che ipotetici.

In tutto, questo studio Le richiederà **20 minuti** circa.

Questo studio non presenta rischi a noi noti.

Per poter prendere parte allo studio, Le chiediamo di leggere attentamente e compilare il presente modulo. Dopo aver compilato e inviato il modulo, riceverà una copia con le Sue risposte all'indirizzo e-mail che avrà indicato in questo stesso modulo.

In seguito, la responsabile della raccolta dati (Sandra Angela Opack, 892845@stud.unive.it) Le invierà un'e-mail all'indirizzo da Lei fornito con le indicazioni e il link per compilare il questionario previsto dallo studio.

Contatti

Per qualsiasi domanda relativa alle procedure dello studio e per modificare/revocare il consenso alla partecipazione allo studio, ora o in futuro, può contattare:

- **Supervisori della ricerca:**

Prof. Fabio Caon: fabiocaon@unive.it

Dott.ssa Sveva Battaglia: sveva.battaglia@unive.it

Dott.ssa Karin Zambonati: karin.zambonati@unive.it

- **Ricercatrice /responsabile della raccolta dati:**

Sandra Angela Opack: 892845@stud.unive.it

- **Eventuali altri recapiti**:

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Informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali nell'ambito del progetto

Strategie di apprendimento, didattica metacognitiva nella Classe Ad Abilità Differenziata(Mixed Ability Classes)

ai sensi dell'art.13 del Regolamento UE 2016/679 ("Regolamento")

Con il presente documento, l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia ("Università") le fornisce informazioni in merito al trattamento dei dati personali raccolti all'interno del progetto di tesi di Laurea Magistrale denominato "Strategie di apprendimento, didattica metacognitiva nella Classe ad Abilità Differenziate (Mixed Abilities Classes)" che si prefigge di indagare l'uso delle strategie di apprendimento della lingua inglese da parte degli/delle insegnanti di scuola primaria (sia in formazione che in servizio). Inoltre, si intende analizzare come tali strategie vengano applicate o possano, in futuro, essere integrate nell'insegnamento e nelle attività didattiche per le classi quarte e quinte della scuola primaria da parte degli/delle stessi/e partecipanti allo studio

Lo studio è condotto dalla studentessa/laureanda Sandra Angela Opack sotto la supervisione del Prof. Fabio Caon, della Dott.ssa Sveva Battaglia e della dottoranda Karin Zambonati quali *Principal Investigator*s Ove necessitasse di ulteriori informazioni relative al progetto, la preghiamo di contattare i *Principal Investigators* scrivendo agli'indirizzi di posta elettronica fabiocaon@unive.it ; sveva.battaglia@unive.it ; karin.zambonati@unive.it .

Il progetto è stato redatto conformemente agli standard metodologici del settore disciplinare interessato ed è depositato presso il Laboratorio BemboLab di Ca' Bembo – Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali Comparati dell'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia ove verrà conservato, assieme alla documentazione ad essi

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inerenti (salvo le pubblicazioni nel frattempo effettuate), per cinque anni dalla conclusione programmata della ricerca stessa.

La presente informativa è resa alla/al partecipante via e-mail, tramite copia del presente modulo compilato.

1. **Titolare del Trattamento**

Il Titolare del Trattamento è l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia con sede legale in Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, rappresentata dal Magnifico Rettore *pro tempore*.

2. **Responsabile della Protezione dei Dati**

L'Università Ca' Foscari ha nominato il "Responsabile della Protezione dei Dati", che può essere contattato scrivendo all'indirizzo di posta elettronica dpo@unive.it o al seguente indirizzo: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Responsabile della Protezione dei Dati, Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia (VE).

3. **Categorie di Dati Personali, Finalità e Base Giuridica**

Il trattamento ha ad oggetto i seguenti dati personali: dati anagrafici del/della partecipante (nome, cognome, genere, fascia d'età), titolo di studio, tipo di scuola secondaria di secondo grado frequentata, dati riguardanti la propria lingua madre e le lingue conosciute, dati di contatto (indirizzo e-mail), esperienze pregresse nel campo dell'insegnamento.

L'indirizzo e-mail servirà per ricevere informazioni e istruzioni sulle attività dello studio da parte della ricercatrice. I predetti dati saranno raccolti attraverso un questionario somministrato online tramite un Google Form, il cui link Le verrà comunicato dalla ricercatrice responsabile della raccolta dati via e-mail, all'indirizzo da Lei fornito.

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Il trattamento dei dati personali verrà effettuato con strumenti cartacei ed informatici, adottando misure tecniche e organizzative adeguate a proteggerli da accessi non autorizzati o illeciti, dalla distruzione, dalla perdita di integrità e riservatezza, anche accidentali.

Per la tutela della riservatezza dei/delle partecipanti, i dati verranno successivamente privati dei riferimenti direttamente identificativi (ad es. nome e cognome, etc.), in modo che non siano più immediatamente riconducibili al soggetto a cui si riferiscono, e analizzati ai soli fini della realizzazione del suddetto progetto.

A ogni partecipante sarà assegnato un codice univoco che verrà utilizzato durante tutto il processo di collezione e analisi dei dati sperimentali (ad esempio: *Partecipante_02*). I dati di ciascun/ciascuna partecipante saranno quindi archiviati con tale codice.

Le attività di ricerca sono svolte nell'ambito dell'esecuzione delle finalità istituzionali di ricerca scientifica dell'Ateneo, pertanto la base giuridica è rappresentata dall'art. 6.1.e) del Regolamento ("esecuzione di un compito di interesse pubblico") . Lei potrà revocare il Suo consenso in qualsiasi momento senza subire alcun pregiudizio, scrivendo ai supervisori della ricerca e/o al Responsabile della Protezione dei Dati personali ai recapiti sopra indicati. L'Ateneo si asterrà dal trattare ulteriormente i predetti dati personali salvo sussistano motivi cogenti che legittimino la prosecuzione dello stesso

4. **Tempi di Conservazione**

I dati saranno conservati in forma pseudonimizzata (con il codice univoco del/della partecipante) per la durata del progetto e successivamente cancellati.

5. **Destinatari e Categorie di Destinatari dei Dati Personali**

I dati raccolti saranno trattati dai ricercatori/dalle ricercatrici dell'Università e dai ricercatori/dalle ricercatrici impegnati/e nel progetto, che agiscono sulla base di specifiche istruzioni fornite in ordine alle finalità e modalità del trattamento medesimo, nonché da soggetti che forniscono servizi ausiliari all'Università

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nominati 'responsabili del trattamento'. La lista aggiornata dei responsabili del trattamento è disponibile alla pagina: https://www.unive.it/pag/34666/.

I dati, **in forma aggregata ed anonima** (in modo da non renderla identificabile), potranno inoltre essere comunicati ad altre Università o enti per lo svolgimento delle attività di ricerca e diffusi per attività di disseminazione dei risultati (ad es. in pubblicazioni, tesi, rapporti di ricerca, nonché citazioni durante lezioni, seminari e convegni). Potranno altresì esaminare tutta la documentazione (comprensiva dei dati identificativi dei partecipanti) raccolta nell'ambito del progetto sia organismi nazionali e internazionali sia comitati delle riviste scientifiche italiane e straniere al fine di controllare che la ricerca sia condotta correttamente e in conformità alle disposizioni vigenti, nonché eventuali auditor.

6. Diritti dell'Interessato e Modalità di Esercizio

Lei potrà esercitare nei confronti dell'Università Ca' Foscari tutti i diritti previsti dagli artt. 15 e ss. del Regolamento; in particolare, potrà ottenere: l'accesso ai dati personali, la loro rettifica o integrazione, la cancellazione (c.d. "diritto all'oblio"), la limitazione e l'opposizione del trattamento. La richiesta potrà essere presentata, senza alcuna formalità, contattando direttamente i *Principal Investigators* Prof. Fabio Caon (fabiocaon@unive.it), Dott.ssa Sveva Battaglia (sveva.battaglia@unive.it), dottoranda Karin Zambonati (karin.zambonati@unive.it) e/o il Responsabile della Protezione dei Dati (dpo@unive.it) ovvero inviando una comunicazione al seguente recapito: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia – Responsabile della Protezione dei dati, Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia. In alternativa, è possibile contattare l'Università, scrivendo a PEC protocollo@pec.unive.it.

Inoltre, se ritiene che i dati personali siano stati trattati in violazione a quanto disposto dal Regolamento, potrà fare reclamo al Garante per la Protezione dei Dati Personali o adire le opportune sedi giudiziarie.

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CONSENSO ALLA PARTECIPAZIONE ALL'ATTIVITÀ DI RICERCA

Il/La sottoscritto/a (*nome e cognome*) _____

indirizzo e-mail _____

DICHIARA

di aver letto con attenzione e compreso le informazioni contenute nel presente modulo e nell'informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali.

Il consenso potrà essere modificato/revocato in qualsiasi momento.

Il/La sottoscritto/a riceverà una copia del presente modulo compilata al proprio indirizzo e-mail.

☐ Acconsento a partecipare allo studio e dichiaro di aver letto l'informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali

☐ Non acconsento a partecipare allo studio e dichiaro di aver letto l'informativa sul trattamento dei dati personal

ANNEX 2- COMPLETE QUESTIONNAIRE

Language Proficiency and Background Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Your responses will help us understand your language background and proficiency.

1. **Age range:**

   Please specify your age range.

   - 20-23 years old
   - 24-30 years old
   - 31-40 years old
   - 41-50 years old
   - 50 +years old
   - Prefer not to say

2. **Gender:**
   Please specify your gender.
   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-binary
   - Prefer not to say
   - Other: _____

3. **What is your highest level of formal education obtained?**
   - High School Diploma/certificate
   - Bachelor's Degree
   - Master's Degree
   - Doctorate
4. **Bachelor's Degree in:**

5. **Master's Degree in:**

6. **What kind of upper secondary school did you attend?**
   - Liceo Classico (Classical High School)
   - Liceo Linguistico (Language High School)
   - Liceo Scientifico (Scientific High School)
   - Liceo delle Scienze Umane (Human Sciences High School)
   - Istituto Tecnico (Technical Institute)
   - Istituto Professionale (Vocational Institute)
   - Other: _____

7. **What is your home/native language/s?**
8. **Please list all other languages you are familiar with, apart from your native language.**
9. **For each language you listed above, rate your proficiency in the following areas:**

- **1 = Beginner**
- **2 = Intermediate**
- **3 = Advanced**
- **4 = Native/Bilingual**

Language	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Language 1	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]
Language 2	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]
Language 3	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]	[1-4]

(Add more rows as needed)

11. Do you have any classroom teaching experience?
    No
    Yes, 0–1 year
    Yes, 1–2 years
    Yes, 3–4 years
    Yes, 5+ years
12. Are you currently teaching in a preschool or primary school?
    Yes
    No
    If yes, specify the duration (e.g., number of months/years): _____
13. Do you have any previous teaching experience in a preschool or primary school?
    Yes
    No
    If yes, specify the duration (e.g., number of months/years): _____
14. Do you have teaching experience in other types of schools (e.g., lower secondary, upper secondary, nursery)?
    Yes
    No
    If yes, specify the type of school: _____
    If yes, specify the duration (e.g., number of months/years): _____
    Other (please specify): _____
15. **Additional Comments:**
    Is there any other information you'd like to provide regarding your language skills or educational background?

Questionnaire about experience using language learning strategies

Please answer the following questions about your experience using language learning strategies using this scale from 1(lowest) to 5 (highest)

i.e. ***1 (Never) to 5 (Always)***

1.What strategies do you use when planning your language learning?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I plan my language practice sessions in advance.					
I decide which areas (e.g., grammar, speaking, listening) to focus on before studying.					
I seek out resources like books, videos, or apps to help me learn.					
I set short-term and long-term goals for language learning.					
I organize my notes and materials to help with learning.					
I schedule regular time for reviewing what I've learned.					

2.What strategies do you use when monitoring your progress?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I notice when I don't understand something and try to figure it out.					
I listen to how native speakers and my peers use the language to improve my skills.					
I adjust my learning methods if I find they're not effective.					
I ask for feedback from teachers or peers to monitor my improvement.					
I repeat difficult tasks to track improvement over time.					
I compare my speaking, reading, or writing to that of more advanced speakers.					

3.What strategies do you use to evaluate your learning?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

I review what I have learned to see how much I remember.					
I assess whether my goals for language learning have been achieved.					
I identify my strengths and weaknesses in the language.					
I consider how I can use my language skills in real-life situations.					
I reward myself when I reach a language learning milestone.					
I reflect on whether my study habits are effective.					

Teaching Language Learning Strategies (LLSs)

Instructions

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

If you are an in-service preschool or primary school teacher (currently teaching), please answer *according to **your experience** approaching and applying language learning strategies* in a **4th or 5th grade EFL classroom**.

If you are a preservice teacher (with no teaching experience), please answer according to ***how you plan to*** approach or apply language learning strategies in a **4th or 5th grade EFL classroom.**

1. **Scenario:** ***Some of your students struggle to find things to say during speaking practice. How would you help them plan their speaking activities?***

a. Explicitly teach students how to plan their responses by setting goals (e.g., include two new vocabulary words) and brainstorming ideas before speaking.
b. Provide a demonstration on how to structure sentences or create key phrases for the speaking activity.
c. Pair the student with a classmate to brainstorm and practice speaking ideas through a fun activity, like role-playing or storytelling.
d. Use flashcards or picture prompts to help students generate ideas for speaking and encouraging students to choose which ones fit their speaking goals.
e. Other (please specify) …….

2. Scenario: ***Your students have different levels of ability and struggle to focus on specific skills during language activities. How would you help them prioritize their learning?***

a. Teach all students to set small, clear goals tailored to their level (e.g., beginners focus on learning new words, advanced students focus on using idiomatic phrases).
b. Focus on one key area (e.g., listening for details) but provide differentiated examples for varying ability levels.
c. Give students a checklist of skills (basic to advanced) and guide them to choose goals based on their proficiency.

d. Pair students of different abilities to share strategies, with “advanced” students mentoring beginners while also reflecting on their own learning.
e. Other (please specify) …….

3. Scenario: ***You want to help students set achievable goals for speaking practice. How would you incorporate goal setting into your lesson?***
a. Provide ready-made goal options for students to choose from and evaluate their success with a quick self-check.
b. Set one shared goal for the class (e.g., "improve fluency") and guide all activities toward achieving it.
c. Encourage students to create personal speaking goals with a peer and reflect on them together after the activity.
d. Teach students how to set specific, measurable goals (e.g., "use 5 new words in a conversation") and review them after the task.
e. Other (please specify) …….

4. Scenario: ***Your students enjoy engaging with multimedia resources. How would you incorporate these into their language learning?***
a. Play short, age-appropriate videos (like cartoons or songs) and have students repeat or act out phrases.
b. Use an app or game on a tablet that encourages speaking and listening, like pronunciation challenges.
c. Bring simple storybooks with colourful pictures and read aloud, asking students to repeat key words or phrases.
d. Organize a "language treasure hunt," where students use visual or audio clues to learn new words.
e. Other (please specify) …….

5.Scenario: ***In your class, some students struggle to keep track of vocabulary and grammar they are learning, while others are more independent. How would you help all students organize their learning?***
a. Provide all students with a vocabulary journal but include differentiated tasks (e.g., beginners record new words with pictures; advanced students write example sentences).
b. Encourage students to create their own systems (e.g., simple charts for beginners, complex outlines for advanced) and share ideas during class.
c. Use a teacher-guided system where you model note organization for the entire class, then allow students to adapt it to their level.
d. Group students by ability to create shared organizational tools they can use and improve together (e.g., a class word bank with different sections for abilities).
e. Other (please specify) …….

6. Scenario: ***During a listening task, some students quickly identify and resolve***

misunderstandings, while others struggle to recognize when they're stuck. How would you help all students monitor their understanding?
a. Teach strategies like pausing, asking questions, and listening for context clues, differentiating examples for varying ability levels.
b. Pause the task to explain difficult parts to the whole class, repeating and explaining where necessary.
c. Provide visual aids or simplified transcripts for beginners while asking advanced students to identify nuanced meanings in the same task.
d. Pair students with different abilities to discuss misunderstandings, encouraging stronger students to model how they resolved theirs.
e. Other (please specify) …….

7. Scenario: ***A group of students is struggling to make progress in speaking fluency. How would you help them adjust their strategies?***
a. Provide immediate feedback during speaking tasks, pointing out what they can do differently in the moment.
b. Teach students to identify which strategies (e.g., repeating phrases, focusing on accuracy) are helping or hindering their fluency and adjust accordingly.
c. Use a reflection activity where students evaluate their speaking strategies and set new goals based on their performance.
d. Introduce new strategies, like practicing with a peer or using simple visual aids, and guide students on how to apply them.
e. Other (please specify) …….

8. Scenario: ***In your class, students vary in their ability to seek and use feedback effectively during speaking tasks. How would you encourage them to ask for and use feedback to improve their speaking skills?***
a. Organize a structured feedback session where you provide targeted feedback to each student based on their level, emphasizing areas for improvement and next steps.
b. Pair students with a peer of similar ability and guide them to exchange feedback using a structured framework (e.g., "What did they do well?" and "What can they improve?").
c. Provide differentiated self-assessment prompts (e.g., "Did I speak clearly?", "Did I use complex sentences?" for advanced students) to help students reflect before asking for specific feedback from peers or the teacher.
d. Teach students to ask targeted questions when seeking feedback (e.g., "How was my pronunciation?", "Did I use the correct tenses?"), modelling examples for the whole class.
e. Other (please specify) …….

9. Scenario: ***After a speaking task, students of different abilities need to evaluate their performance and progress. How would you facilitate this?***
a. Teach all students to use a differentiated self-assessment checklist, with simpler criteria for beginners and advanced criteria for higher-level students.
b. Provide whole-class feedback, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement, and giving individualized suggestions for each level.

c. Pair students of similar abilities to reflect together, encouraging them to set goals based on their shared challenges.
d. Use progress charts where students mark their own achievements, with different benchmarks for beginners and advanced learners.
e. Other (please specify)…….

10. Scenario: Your *students have varied success with their study habits, and some struggle to identify what works best for them. How would you encourage reflection?*
a. Teach students to use a learning journal/diary with differentiated prompts (e.g., "What new words did I learn?"; "How did I use my vocabulary in conversation?").
b. Lead a class discussion on effective study habits, providing examples tailored to different proficiency levels.
c. Group students by ability to discuss their study habits, sharing ideas for improving them based on their specific challenges.
d. Assign a reflective speaking task where students describe their study habits and suggest improvements, offering sentence frames for beginners.
e. Other (please specify)…….