Graduate Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, Reports & Reviews
(Grad.J.InteR[3])
ark:/85846/JPR3.2024AR.02020110
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14253563

ISSN(E): 2584-2919
Vol.02, No.02 (2024)
pp.110-118

Meta-cognition-Driven Problem Solving in Physics Education

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(Received:18-09-2024; Accepted: 02-11-2024; Published Online:01-12-2024)

ABSTRACT:
Background: Meta-cognition, introduced by John H. Flavell, involves awareness and regulation of cognitive processes. In physics education, it plays a critical role in improving problem-solving skills through strategies like planning, monitoring, and evaluation.
Purpose: This study examines how meta-cognitive strategies enhance problem-solving skills in physics, exploring their impact on fostering critical thinking and reflective learning.
Methods: The research synthesizes literature and educational practices, analyzing targeted interventions to improve meta-cognitive awareness. Steps of problem-solving include understanding the problem, recalling knowledge, planning, monitoring, and evaluating.
Results: Findings indicate that meta-cognitive strategies enhance students' ability to tackle complex physics problems, fostering self-regulation and critical thinking.
Conclusions: The integration of meta-cognitive strategies in physics classrooms empowers students to achieve effective and meaningful learning outcomes. Educators are encouraged to adopt these strategies to promote reflective and critical learning.

Keywords: Meta-cognition, Problem Solving, Physics Education, Reflective Thinking, Critical Thinking.

1. Introduction

The concept of meta-cognition is defined by many researchers Biryukov, Goh, Hecker, Iwai, Koriat, Salam, Misu, Rahim, and Wells. For instance, to Koriat meta-cognition means what people know about cognition, their cognitive processes and how they use meta-cognition knowledge to adjust their information processes and behaviours [1]. Physics as a subject demands a high degree of reflective and critical thinking which becomes very systematic through meta-cognitive pathways. In 1979, Flavell stated that, meta-cognitive knowledge is one's stored knowledge or beliefs about oneself and others as cognitive agents, about tasks, about actions or strategies, and about how all these interact to affect the outcomes of any sort of intellectual enterprise[2]. Meta-cognitive experiences are conscious cognitive or affective experiences that occur during the enterprise and concern any aspect of it-often, how well it is going [3]. This self-awareness and self-regulation plays a crucial role in learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. The meta level is where 'thinking about thinking' takes place. At this higher-order level, meta-cognitive strategies are used to make sure the learner reaches the goal they have set [4]. Meta-cognition is thus very useful in physics education at almost all levels, especially in understanding concepts and attempting to solve real-life problems. Meta-cognition is often perceived as an explicit learning goal or is a part of the hidden curriculum [5].

2. Need for Meta-cognition in Problem Solving

Although many descriptions exist for what qualifies as 21st Century skills, student abilities in scientific

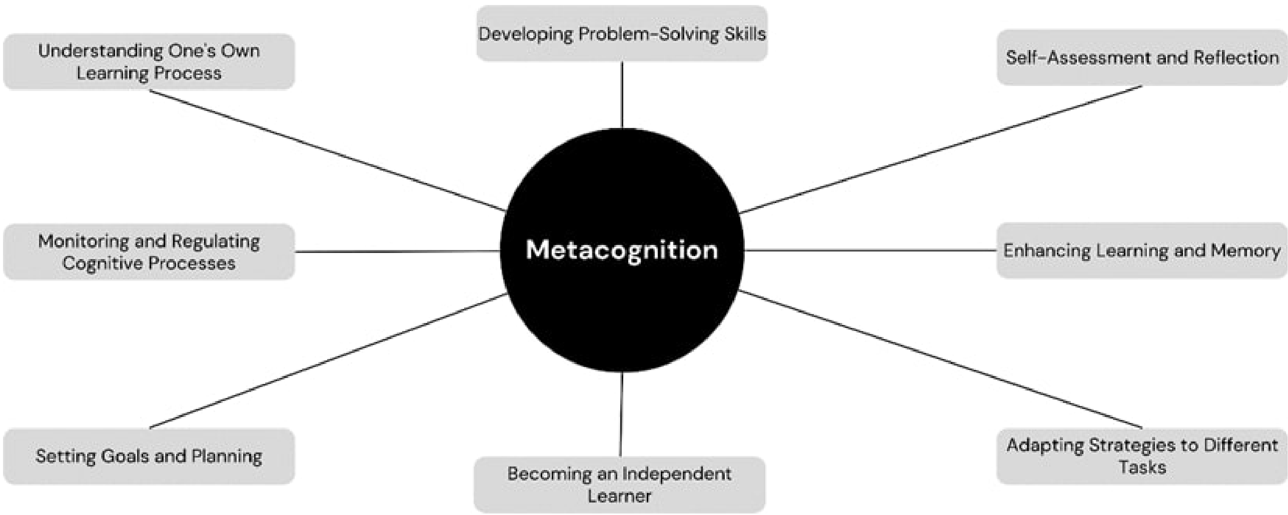

Figure 1: Role of Meta-cognition

reasoning and critical thinking are the most commonly noted and widely studied [6]. The central point of education is to teach people to think, to use their rational powers, to become better problem solvers. Like Gagney, most psychologists and educators regard problem solving as the most important learning outcome of educational endeavors [7].Sciences are centrally concerned with developing and systematizing knowledge that is useful for solving various kinds of problems. In general, Grade 9 students seem to experience a moderate level of meta-cognitive engagement in their physics classrooms, neither high nor low. Up to this, we as science educators, need to provide more meta-cognitive-related experience to our students in physics classrooms in order to help students derive higher level of meta-cognitive experience [8]. The concept of learner-centered, active learning has broad, growing support in the research literature as an empirically validated teaching practice that best promotes learning for modern day students (Active-Learning Theories and Teaching Strategies, 2011). It stems out of the constructionist view of learning, which emphasizes that it is the learner who needs to actively construct knowledge and the teacher should assume the role of a facilitator rather than the source of knowledge.(Constructionist Approach in Teacher Professional Development: An Overview, 2014). In his recent comprehensive meta-analysis study, [9] found that teaching approaches using strategies which emphasize student meta-cognitive and self-regulated learning are among the most effective approaches with a mean effect size of 0.67 (Learning strategies: a synthesis and conceptual model - npj Science of Learning, 2016). Meta-cognition helps students to carry out the steps of problem-solving and manage this process [9]. There have been many ways that the research community has defined problem solving over the years. Since this paper deals with problem solving, a definition of what is meant by that term in this context is needed. Polya said that problem solving was "finding a way out of a difficulty, a way around an obstacle, attaining an aim that was not immediately attainable." [10] defined a problem as "whenever there is a gap between where you are now and where you want to be, and you don't know how to find a way to cross that gap, you have a problem".

3. Objective

I To illustrate the use of meta-cognitive approach for better physics education.

4. Methodology

Meta-cognitive Problem Solving Steps A ball of mass 100g is thrown up with a speed of 10m/s. Find the kinetic energy of the ball at the time of throwing. Also find the maximum height attained by the ball?

4.1. Steps of approaching the problem

4.1.1. Understanding the Question:

In the intricate process of solving a scientific problem, the initial step is akin to laying the foundation of a

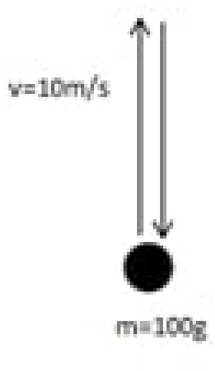

Figure 2: Problem Statement: v= 10 m/s and m=100g

building – understanding the problem. This is not a mere casual reading but a meticulous examination of the problem statement to discern its core essence. As they delve into the problem statement, every word is scrutinized, every nuance absorbed. The objective is not just to read but to truly comprehend the intricacies of what is being asked. It's an intellectual engagement where the student is seeking to unravel the essence of the question before them. In the case of calculating the maximum height of a ball given its mass and velocity, the student actively processes the information. They might articulate their thoughts, thinking, "This problem is tasking me with determining maximum height, specifically for a ball. To crack this, I'll need to apply the concept of kinetic energy, utilizing the provided mass and velocity of the ball." This step involves mental organization and crystallization of the problem's requirements. It's not just about identifying keywords, but understanding the overarching goal – a crucial moment in problem solving.

4.1.2. Recalling Relevant Knowledge:

With a clear grasp of what the problem demands, the student taps into their reservoir of prior knowledge – a reservoir built through lectures, textbooks, and class discussions. In the context of kinetic energy, the student reflects on their understanding of the concept, retrieving it from the depths of their memory. "I recall studying kinetic energy in class, they might think. "It's a concept rooted in Work, Power and Energy that establishes a relationship between a body's velocity and its kinetic energy. In other words, there's a connection between how fast the particle is moving and the corresponding kinetic energy." This step demonstrates meta-cognition

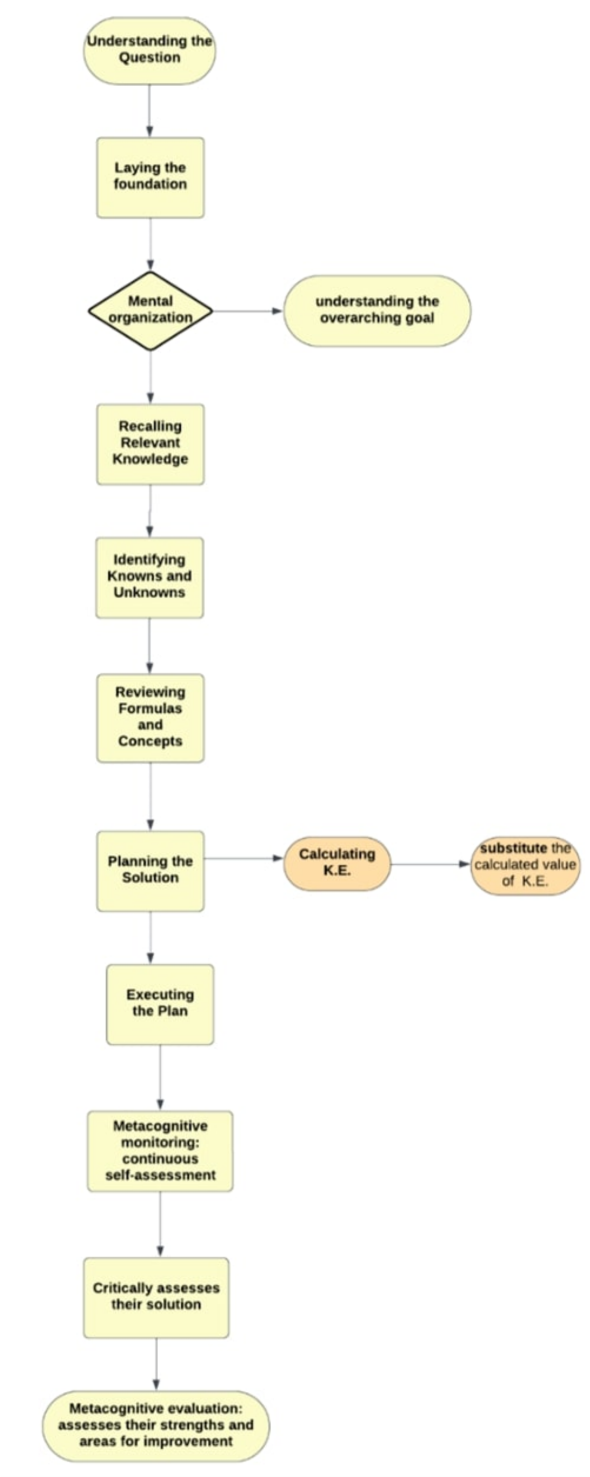

Figure 3: Meta-cognitive process that a student goes through

– the student's ability to not only recall information but to contextualize it within the problem at hand. The mental retrieval of the concept of kinetic energy is not a rote memory exercise; rather, it's a strategic manoeuvre to bring forth relevant knowledge in service of the current problem. The student is now armed with not only an understanding of the problem but a conceptual framework – kinetic energy – to apply in their upcoming problem-solving endeavours.

4.1.3. Identifying Knowns and Unknowns:
Once the problem statement has been thoroughly understood, the student proceeds to identify the known values and the unknowns. This step involves a meticulous examination of the provided information to discern what is given and what needs to be determined. In our scenario, the student meticulously identifies the given values: the mass of the ball (100g) and its velocity (50 m/s). These are the knowns, the concrete pieces of information provided within the problem statement. With clarity, the student acknowledges that they need to calculate the height attained by the ball, which stands as the unknown in this problem. The student's thought process may be succinctly captured as, "I know the mass and velocity of the ball, but I need to find its kinetic energy and then the maximum height." This introspective moment highlights the student's meta-cognitive awareness – their ability to assess what information is at their disposal and what they need to determine to solve the problem effectively.

4.1.4. Reviewing Formulas and Concepts:
Armed with the knowns and unknowns, the student proceeds to draw upon their repository of formulas and concepts related to the problem domain. This step involves a deliberate mental review of relevant formulas and their underlying concepts, allowing the student to leverage their existing knowledge to tackle the problem at hand. In the context of the kinetic energy, the student reflects on their understanding of the formula:

$$K.E. = (\frac{1}{2})mv^2 \tag{1}$$

where K.E. represents the kinetic energy, m denotes mass, and v signifies the velocity of the ball. This formula serves as the foundation for solving the problem, providing a mathematical framework to relate the knowns (mass and velocity) to the unknown (kinetic energy and maximum height). As the student mentally reviews the formula, they delve deeper into the significance of each component, understanding how mass and velocity contribute to kinetic energy, and ultimately, how kinetic energy relates to the height attained by the ball. This reflective process underscores the student's meta-cognitive prowess – their ability to critically evaluate and apply foundational concepts to real-world problem-solving scenarios.

4.1.5. Planning the Solution:
After understanding the problem and reviewing relevant concepts, the student engages in the crucial step of planning their approach to the problem. This phase involves devising a strategic road-map to navigate through the problem-solving process, ensuring clarity and efficiency in execution. Drawing upon their meta-cognitive abilities, the student meticulously plans their solution. They decide to tackle the problem methodically, breaking it down into manageable steps. Their plan begins with:

1. Calculating the kinetic energy of the ball using the formula $K.E. = (\frac{1}{2})mv^2$ where K.E. represents the kinetic energy, m denotes mass, and v represents velocity of the ball.
2. Subsequently, they intend to substitute the calculated kinetic energy into the formula for potential energy.

In their mind, the student articulates their plan, "I'll start by calculating the kinetic energy of the ball using its mass and velocity, and then I'll use that result to find its maximum height." This cognitive strategy exemplifies the student's meta-cognitive awareness – their ability to strategically organize and sequence their problem-solving approach for optimal efficiency and accuracy.

4.1.6. Executing the Plan:
With a clear plan in place, the student proceeds to execute each step of their solution with precision and diligence. Armed with the necessary formulas and values, they methodically perform the calculations, adhering to the road-map they've devised. First the student calculates the momentum of the ball using the provided mass and velocity:

$$K.E. = (\frac{1}{2})mv^2 K.E. = (\frac{1}{2})(0.1kg)(10m/s)^2 \tag{2}$$

This calculation is performed meticulously, ensuring accuracy in each step. Next, the student proceeds to substitute the calculated kinetic energy into the formula for potential energy: (P.E.= mgh), recalling the Law of Conservation of Energy. This fundamental principle asserts that mechanical energy is conserved for a system. Consequently, they deduce that kinetic energy equals potential energy, hence equating K.E.= P.E. leading to the equation, P.E.= 5 J The student then rearranges the potential energy formula to solve for height (h), yielding,

P.E. = mgh

5J = (0.1kg) (10m/s2)h

h = 5m

This process of execution reflects the student's meta-cognitive engagement – their ability to translate their planned approach into concrete actions, with careful attention to detail and accuracy. Each calculation is performed thoughtfully, guided by their strategic plan and conceptual understanding of the problem domain. Thus, in this progression, the student demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of energy conservation and the interrelationship between kinetic and potential energy in the context of the problem.

4.1.7. Monitoring Progress:

As the student progresses through the problem-solving process, they engage in meta-cognitive monitoring to ensure accuracy and logical coherence in their calculations. This phase involves continuous self-assessment and reflection on their problem-solving journey. While performing the calculations, the student remains vigilant, systematically checking their work for any errors or inconsistencies. They maintain an acute awareness of their understanding of each concept and evaluate whether they are applying it correctly. If they encounter any difficulties or uncertainties, they pause to reassess their approach and seek clarification if needed. This meta-cognitive monitoring is akin to a mental quality control process, ensuring that each step of the solution aligns with their conceptual understanding and logical reasoning. It demonstrates the student's proactive approach to problem-solving, characterized by a commitment to accuracy and self-correction.

4.1.8. Reflecting on the Solution:

Upon obtaining the final result, the student engages in reflective meta-cognition to evaluate the validity and coherence of their solution. They take a step back to consider whether the calculated kinetic energy and height attained aligns with their expectations and makes sense in the context of the problem. During this reflective phase, the student critically assesses their solution, comparing it to their prior knowledge and expectations. They might think, "The kinetic energy and the maximum height attained I calculated seems reasonable given the mass and velocity of the ball. It aligns with what I know about the relationship between velocity and kinetic energy." This reflective meta-cognitive process underscores the student's ability to critically evaluate their own work and make informed judgments about its validity.

4.1.9. Evaluating Understanding:

In the final stage of meta-cognitive processing, the student evaluates their understanding of the concept of energy and their ability to apply it to solve problems. They reflect on their performance in this specific instance and consider whether they need further practice or review on this topic. During this evaluation, the student assesses their strengths and areas for improvement, making a mental note to revisit the concept if necessary. This meta-cognitive evaluation serves as a valuable feedback loop, informing the student's future learning strategies and reinforcing their understanding of the topic.

4.1.10. Lessons for future problem solving:

Reflecting on the process of solving the kinetic energy problem offers profound insights into the nuances of problem-solving and the cultivation of reflective thinking skills. As the student navigated through the intricacies of the problem, they recognized the paramount importance of breaking down complex tasks into more manageable steps. This realization underscores fundamental aspect of meta-cognition: the ability to strategically approach problems by deconstructing them into smaller, more digestible components. By consciously planning their approach, the student harnessed the power of meta-cognition to lay a strong foundation for problem-solving, ensuring clarity and coherence in their strategy.

Moreover, meta-cognition prompted the student to adopt a deliberate pause before delving into solutions, a crucial step that allowed them to assess their understanding of the relevant concepts. This reflective pause serves as a cornerstone of effective problem-solving, enabling individuals to identify potential misconceptions or gaps in knowledge before proceeding further. In doing so, the student ensured that their problem-solving process was built upon a solid understanding of the underlying principles, thereby mitigating the risk of errors or inaccuracies down the line.

Throughout the problem-solving journey, the student diligently monitored their progress, continuously scrutinizing each step for potential errors or oversights. This heightened attention to detail and accuracy, facilitated by meta-cognitive awareness, underscores the importance of vigilance and meticulousness in problem-solving endeavours. By actively checking for errors along the way, the student not only upheld the integrity of their solution but also honed their ability to detect and rectify mistakes—a skill that transcends the realm of physics and is applicable across diverse domains. Upon arriving at a solution, the student engaged in reflective thinking, a process that serves as a catalyst for learning and growth. By critically evaluating their solution, the student identified areas of strength and areas for improvement, thereby deepening their understanding of the underlying concepts. This reflective practice fosters meta-cognitive development by encouraging individuals to analyse their approaches, recognize patterns, and refine their strategies for future problem-solving endeavours.

In essence, the meta-cognitive approach employed by the student not only enhanced their problem-solving skills but also cultivated a habit of reflective thinking—an invaluable asset that empowers individuals to navigate challenges with confidence and efficacy. By embracing meta-cognition as a guiding principle in their learning journey, the student is equipped to tackle future challenges with resilience, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to continuous improvement. Meta-cognitive development is typically seen as a necessary step in becoming a life-long learner .

5. Discussions and Interpretation

5.1. How Meta-cognitive approach is better:

"This National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower." [11] In the context of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, adopting a meta-cognitive approach in physics education can significantly enhance learning outcomes and student engagement by laying emphasis on providing a nurturing environment and culture. One key aspect of the NCF-SE 2023 is its emphasis on promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills (NCFSE, 2023). .A meta-cognitive approach aligns well with this goal by encouraging students to reflect on their problem-solving strategies, identify misconceptions, and adjust their approaches accordingly.

In physics education, where students often encounter complex problems that require creative solutions, fostering meta-cognitive skills can help students navigate challenges more effectively. Furthermore, the NCF-SE 2023 emphasizes the importance of promoting active learning and inquiry-based approaches (NCF-SE, 2023). Meta-cognition encourages students to take ownership of their learning process, prompting them to ask questions, seek clarification, and explore alternative solutions. This active engagement not only deepens students' understanding of physics concepts but also cultivates a sense of curiosity and intellectual curiosity. Moreover, the NCF-SE 2023 underscores the need for promoting inclusivity and accessibility in education (NCF-SE, 2023). A meta-cognitive approach can benefit all students, including those with diverse learning styles and abilities, by providing them with the tools and strategies to approach physics problems in a way that best suits their individual needs. By encouraging students to reflect on their learning processes and seek support when needed, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. In summary, adopting a meta-cognitive approach in physics education aligns with the principles and goals outlined in the NCF-SE 2023 (NCF-SE, 2023). By empowering students to monitor, regulate, and reflect on their learning, educators can foster critical thinking, active learning, and inclusivity, ultimately enhancing students' engagement and success in physics education.

6. Findings and Conclusion

The application of meta-cognitive strategies in problem-solving not only enhances the proficiency of students in tackling academic challenges but also fosters a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Through the systematic integration of meta-cognitive steps, students engage in a process of self-regulation and improvement in cognitive processes, leading to more effective learning outcomes. By employing meta-cognitive strategies such as understanding the problem, recalling relevant concepts, planning the solution, monitoring progress, reflecting on the solution, and evaluating understanding, students cultivate a methodical and thoughtful approach to learning. These strategies promote deep understanding by encouraging students to actively engage with the material, identify areas of strength and weakness, and adapt their problem-solving approaches accordingly. Moreover, the systematic application of meta-cognitive strategies facilitates effective problem-solving, enabling students to navigate complex tasks with confidence and competence. By breaking down problems into manageable steps, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their solutions, students develop the skills necessary to overcome obstacles and achieve success in academic endeavors. Furthermore, the long-term retention of knowledge is enhanced through the utilization of meta-cognitive strategies. By encouraging students to reflect on their learning processes and evaluate their understanding, these strategies promote meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom. In conclusion, the integration of meta-cognitive strategies in problem-solving serves as a catalyst for academic success and intellectual growth. By fostering deep understanding, effective problem-solving, and long-term retention of knowledge, these strategies empower students to become independent and lifelong learners capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world. As educators, it is imperative to recognize the importance of meta-cognition in facilitating student learning and to provide opportunities for students to develop and refine these essential skills.

Authorship contribution: The sole author is accountable for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.
Funding: No funding by any agency.
Conflict of interest: Author has no conflict of interest with anyone.
Declaration: It is an original data and has not been sent or published anywhere.
Similarity Index: The authors hereby confirm that there is no similarity index in abstract and conclusion while overall is less than 10% where individual source contribution is 2% or less than it.

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Muskan Modi (2024). Meta-cognition-Driven Problem Solving in Physics Education. *Graduate Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, Reports and Reviews*, 2(02), 110-118. Retrieved from https://jpr.vyomhansjournals.com/index.php/gjir/article/view/32