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Learners' Perceptions of Task Repetition: Distributed Practice Effects on Engagement and Metacognitive Judgement

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Abstract

This study seeks to dwell on the effects task repetition and distributed practice have on the learners' engagement and metacognitive judgment among English language learners. This is a mixed-methods study with a sample drawn from 150 students of the University of Sunderland, establishing the opinion of the learners regarding the effects of these instructional strategies. The results therefore speak to a broadly positive view for both practices: task repetitions are valued for helping enhance proficiency and solidifying learning, while distributed practice is praised to enhance engagement and bulwark metacognitive skills over time. The findings from this study further the importance of learner perceptions in language learning strategy efficacy, thus supporting the critical role of task repetition and distributed practice in drawing forth effective language learning.

KEYWORDS

Task repetition, distributed practice, learner engagement, metacognitive judgement, language learning

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Introduction

Task repetition is part and parcel of language learning that contributes to consolidating skills already acquired and improving the learning process (Bygate, 2001). Repetition is, therefore, based on the fact that it lets learners process language at a deeper level of focus on form and meaning, thus improving fluency and accuracy (Gass & Mackey, 2007). With all being said, distributed practice places emphasis on the temporal dimension of learning. It is, by then, suggesting that massing learning activities together in time may never be more effective in increasing long-term retention. The two constructs then collide with one another in language pedagogy, giving birth to a very complex learning landscape. Cognitive load theory postulates that learning is optimal under just-manageable conditions of resources (Sweller, 1988). It is thus conceivable that task repetition would be an intermediate condition balancing the load from input against consolidation and that such a condition could be instated within a distributed practice framework. This means that the engagement and its outcomes are based on students' perceptions and attitudes toward task repetition. Attitudes of the learners toward the efficacy of the task are based on an ecological approach and are determined by the perceptions that the task has relevance to personal learning styles and cultural learning norms (van Lier, 2004). Even though some learners find this technique most helpful in cases where they can correct and improve their performance, it is reported to be redundant and even boring in some cases (Lynch & Maclean, 2001). Pertinently, this factor of

English language learning in the United Kingdom is very significant in the light of understanding the attitudes of the students, as the learners are reported to belong to a diverse student population. However, this may be influenced by factors such as the learner's first language, proficiency level, the goals of the learner with respect to the task at hand, and past learning experiences (Ellis, 2003). This has been one of the main foci of much empirical research: the impact of distributed practice on learner engagement. The spacing effect is critical to review the concept of distributed practice because it hypothesises that the information is usually remembered better when exposure to that information occurs over a large span of time rather than a brief one (Ebbinghaus, 1885/1913). These effects, in turn, help the learners slowly build knowledge, and in that way, make it possible for the learners to engage without falling victim to cognitive overload (Carpenter et al. 887).

However, learner characteristics and the context of any learning to which distributed practice is applied are critical. Though distributed practice may be beneficial, at the same time, it requires very high self-regulation and motivation on the part of the learners to engage in learning for much longer times. This can become a very onerous task, more so with learners of weak metacognitive ability or in contexts not promoting regular and lifelong participation (Zimmerman, 2002). Defined in this way, therefore, metacognitive judgment is important both for learning and distributed practice. One can be based upon metacognitive judgment—the ability of a learner to gauge his or her progress in learning and to adjust his or her strategies: (Flavell). Learners with high metacognitive skills will find benefits from distributed practice, since they are able to plan, monitor, and adjust the learning process in a strategic way. (Son & Kornell, 2008). Contrasting, learners with low development of metacognitive skills may find it a problem, since distributed practice needs ability in making effective time and learning resource management. In the United Kingdom, with respect to the context of learning the English language, metacognitive judgment would be relevant, since most of the language learners work in a self-regulatory manner outside the classroom and within an integrated group of diverse backgrounds (Benson, 2001). Repetitive tasks and distributed practice both yield useful strategies aimed at enhancing language learning. However, effectiveness is predicated on the critical say of learners' perceptions and metacognitive judgments when enacting these strategies. Task repetition and distributed practice may be individualised to the learners and the contexts within which they find themselves. Task repetition is a major concept in second language acquisition. It is premised on the idea of proceduralisation, in which learners' explicit and declarative knowledge of the rules of language is transformed into implicit procedural use in communication (DeKeyser, 2007). The idea is not to repeat the same, exact, identical task verbatim repeatedly but to allow each repetition to actually deepen understanding and automaticity each successive time it is done. It consequently proceeds to deep processing of information, hence strengthening memory traces and the formation of robust representations in the mind (Craik & Lockhart, 1972).

The repetition of the task makes it possible for the learner to focus on language form and content at the same time (Bygate, 2001). Each time a student performs a similar task repeatedly, errors are reduced in the learners, and the speed of response, along with fluency, increases (Gass & Mackey,

2007). Thus, effects of task repetition were not homogenised, possibly differing as a function of task complexity, among other things, and the learners' proficiency level. This suggests that complex tasks (involving higher-order thinking skills) will show better performance with repetition than simple tasks (Robinson, 2001). Distributed practice, on the other hand, is based on the spacing effect: learning distributed to occur at different times is more effective than massing study sessions into one separate session (Cepeda et al., 2006). The elementary mechanism of the spacing effect is still under hot debate. Some theories indicate that the space between every repetition encourages the learner to retrieve the material that was learned last time, thus helping in the strengthening of memory (Karpicke & Roediger, 2007). Some even posited that the spacing effect is mediated by session-to-session variability in the learning context, producing over various sessions—more unique, diverse encoding and retrieval cues (Smith & Rothkopf, 1984). In language learning, distributed practice may manifest itself in many ways: grammar lessons can be spread over a period of time, vocabulary sessions can take place two to three times a week, and repetition of a task can be distributed. One of the important issues that have salience across distributed practice is the question of the timing or "lag" of repetitions. A lag too short could minimise the benefit of spacing, while one that is too long could cause interference from forgetting (Cepeda et al., 2008). Most optimally, the lag will likely differ in the complexity of the material and the learner's proficiency level. This means that the impact of repetition of tasks, together with distributed practice, is of very great importance regarding the involvement of the learner. Therefore, at the very least, task repetition may enhance one's engagement by boosting self-efficacy, especially where improvement is made across the repetitions (Bandura, 1997). According to Carpenter et al., 2012, distributed practice has the ability to be a sustained engagement over time because it reduces cognitive overload in creating manageable learning episodes.

This kind of intersection of strategies, however, is bound to run into some challenges. For instance, consider the case when task repetitions are prolonged over time. There is likely to be noticed some sort of deceleration in motivation as the subject perceives less and less progress. Thus, individual characteristics and contextual considerations of the learners will need to be taken into account in this way during the balancing of these strategies. Thus, individual differences of the learners at present call for the need to individualise the use of task repetition and distributed practice. Future research should look at how educators could orient these strategies in responding to learners' perceptions in order to enhance their engagement and judgment of their metacognitive ability. For instance, digital technologies provide some promising means of personalised language learning that adapts to the preferences and needs of individual learners (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

Literature Review

The very complex and demanding process of learning a language depends, to a large extent, on the approaches that make use of task repetition or distributed practice. The approaches assure learners of repeated exposure to the language material over a period of time. Highlighting the important benefits of these tools with respect to the ways CMC use impacts learners' metacognitive judgment

and engagement is of great importance (Bygate, 2001; Cepeda et al., 2006; Rohrer, 2015; Serrano & Munoz, 2017).

Task Repetition in Language Learning

The repetition of task provides a learner with multiple exposures to the same language material. Each successive repetition, therefore, allows learners to refine their performance, to consolidate further their knowledge, hence leading to greater fluency, accuracy, and complexity of language use (Bygate, 2001; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). This was an improvement that came from the drop of cognitive load and the freedom to shift attention between form and meaning in the course of the task. Improved language proficiency arising from task repetition has been reported by researchers. According to Bygate (2001), the students' fluency and complexity of oral narratives improved after the repetition of the task. Following this, Samuda and Bygate (2008) had reported some good results in grammatical accuracy. Such positive results are argued to have positive implications on the task repetition supporting the internalisation of language knowledge for enhanced language competence. However, the findings of task repetition might be contingent on task type, complexity, and learners' proficiency level. According to Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011), task repetition helped more in the complex tasks performed by high-proficiency learners. This means that task repetition may need a finer approach toward understanding its implementation for high efficacy.

Learners' Perceptions of Task Repetition

The learners' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, learning strategies have an immense bearing on their engagement and learning results (Dornyei, 2001). However, researchers have largely overlooked the perception of the task repetition among learners. Mixed results have been found with studies dealing with the perception of task repetition as perceived by learners. Indeed, Lynch and Maclean (2001) reported that while some learners appreciate the opportunity to "hone" their performance, others are of the view that the repetition of tasks is "boring and dull. Such contrasting attitudes from the need indicate the following: a more individualistic way in the application of task repetition, giving equal respect to preferences and attitude of learners. Distributed practice is another learning strategy that distributes learning activities over time. It is the learning strategy that spaces the learning activities in line with the spacing effect. Spaced learning activities have better retentive abilities than massed learning activities (Cepeda et al., 2006; Rohrer, 2015; Ebbinghaus, 1885/1913). Serrano and Munoz (2017) indicated that distributed practice for vocabulary learning was superior to massed practice. Distributed practice, in other words, would probably prove useful for enhancing long-term retention of language material, if not for language proficiency in general.

Learners' Engagement and Metacognitive Judgement in Distributed Practice

For distributed practice to be construed as prolonged and self-regulated learning, it would be very helpful to know how it influences learners' engagement and metacognitive judgment. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) defined learning engagement as a function of the attention, curiosity,

and interest a learner displays in a given learning context. On the other hand, metacognitive judgment involves the ability of the learner to evaluate the understanding and regulation of the learning process depending on the result obtained (Flavell, 1979). However, despite the proved effectiveness of mass practice in numerous works and its effect on learners' involvement and metacognitive judgment, the existing research is still insufficient. These are the areas that need to be addressed by further research in order to come up with a clear view of how distributed practice influences language learning. On the other side, in terms of learner strategies, task repetition and distributed practice have both been found to bring positive results. Further research should examine the effect of such strategies on learners' interaction with metacognitive judgments. Future research on this aspect would require understanding how the strategies can work with individual learners so that different needs and preferences are taken into account for optimising language learning outcomes.

Many scholars consider that the repetition of tasks could be one effective technique to enhance speaking ability, mainly focusing on fluency, in task-based language learning (TBLT) (Ahmadian, 2011; Bygate, 2001; de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; Suzuki, 2021). The repetition of the task directs the learners' attention to the formulation, while it encourages the repeated use of linguistic expressions for the development of speaking skills (Bygate, 2001; de Jong & Tillman, 2018). However, educators do have some concern in regard to students' perception of task repetition, as this has the potential to make learners bored, which can decrease their engagement (Ahmadian et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2019). From this, it thus follows that the repetition is justified, but not always: the repetition of data in educational settings, including L2 classrooms, usually leads to decreased motivation and interest, in pupils apparently and most likely in students at the tertiary level (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018). Despite this likely downside, task repetition gives a continuum for teachers and learners to get a systematic practice opportunity for enhancing their skills in L2 teaching and learning (DeKeyser, 2007; Sato & McDonough, 2019; Suzuki et al., 2019a). However, differences in the repetition methods, especially exact same-task repetition versus procedural task repetition, rather invoke different perceptions from the learners; in contrast, same-task repetition does lead to perceived repetitiveness and experience but is still helpful for fluency enhancement (de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Suzuki, 2021). In this respect, boredom is an invitation for more research with the view of expanding the attitudes of learners in relation to different repeating approaches (Kim, 2013; Pinter, 2007).

The learner's perception of repetition in the task is constituted by emotional and metacognitive engagements. An emotional engagement reflects a learner's affective reaction during the task performances, when pleasant emotions signal activity engagement and unpleasant ones signal disengagement. Skinner et al. (2008) However, even though such emotional engagement was looked at across task designs, relatively few studies have focused on whether emotional engagement takes place in the exact same-task repetition (Qiu & Lo, 2017). This is parallel to metacognitive judgment, which means that the perception of task effectiveness by the learner similarly influences learning behavior (Kornell & Bjork, 2008; Kornell & Metcalfe, 2006). As far

as metacognitive judgment is concerned, previous studies have found learners' optimal repetition frequencies during task repetitions for possible skill improvements (Lambert et al., 2017). However, the association between metacognitive judgment and actual performance gain requires more detailed research. Spaced repetition illuminates the fact that distributed practice seems to be a strategy for an improved perception of the task repetitiveness by students in the learning process (Cepeda et al., 2006). Spacing not only improves long-term retention but also serves to enhance metacognitive judgments in such a way that massed practice and the associated illusion of competence are tempered (Bjork et al., 2013; Nakata & Suzuki, 2019a, 2019b). The gaps are filled, at least in part, in terms of the role that spacing plays in L2 vocabulary and grammar tasks. Further research is needed to be very apparent in respect to its role in L2 speaking skill development, emotional engagement, and metacognitive judgment.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilised a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This research design was selected due to its strength in providing a comprehensive understanding of the research question. While the quantitative approach offered a way to gather numerical data that could be statistically analysed, the qualitative approach provided nuanced insights into learners' experiences and perspectives, enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

The participants in this study were 150 English language learners based in the United Kingdom. They were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation of various learner profiles in terms of age, proficiency level, and educational background. The sample consisted of both male and female learners, with ages ranging from 16 to 40 years old. Their proficiency levels varied from beginner to advanced and they were students from different educational institutions, including high schools, colleges, and universities.

Data Collection

Data were collected in a mixed-methods approach made up of three parts: a questionnaire survey, think-aloud protocols when carrying out language tasks, and semi-structured interviews. It was considered that each of these would provide a different aspect in the examination of the phenomena of task repetition and distributed practice.

Surveys

Participation was solicited by using a survey that was developed to quantify participants' experiences with the strategy in both task repetition and distributed practice. As the instrument of survey items, it tapped into the aspects of learner engagement, metacognitive judgment, perceived advantages, and obstacles encountered with these strategies through questions graded on a Likert

scale. The items of the survey were developed based on existing academic work to ensure that the tool captures face validity and content validity (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

Think-aloud Protocols

Think-aloud protocols were used to capture the cognitive processes of the learners involved in language tasks. Participants were supposed to provide their thoughts in the course of performing language-related activities and provided immediate information on their processing during the interaction with both repetition of a task and distributed practice. The qualitative data was an explanation to the contextual background of the quantitative findings derived from the surveys (Ericsson & Simon, 1993).

Semi-structured Interviews

Following the tasks, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into learners' perceptions. The interview questions were meant to give the participants a chance to reflect on their experiences of task repetition and distributed practice, their perceived strengths and weaknesses in both strategies, and their perception regarding the effect of both strategies on involvement and metacognitive judgment. These interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and analysed for recurrent themes using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The use of the three methodological approaches used in this study gave the study triangulation, which increased its overall validity and reliability. This thus offers a full methodological framework for the inquiry of nuanced dynamics of task repetition and distributed practice in language learning.

Findings

Such findings in the present study would enlighten the stakeholders on a broader perspective of the learners with respect to task repetition and distributed practice. There were consistent data from survey, think-aloud protocols, and interview administered in this study, which brought to light that indeed learners highly approve of both task repetition and distributed practices in the context of learning the English language.

Table 1 presents the learners' general rating of task repetition. The result from the 5-point Likert scale showed that the respondents rated task repetition to have a big influence, both on solidifying the learning (M = 4.2, SD = 0.71) and improving language skills (M = 4.1, SD = 0.68). This was also evidenced in the qualitative data supplied by the think-aloud protocols and interviews. Learners would often state that one of the major advantages of task repetition is developing increased familiarity with language tasks (M = 4.0, SD = 0.66) and decreasing cognitive load (M = 4.3, SD = 0.60) and better performance (M = 4.)

Table 1

Learners' Perception of Task Repetition

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Solidification of Learning	4.2	0.71
Enhancement of Proficiency	4.1	0.68
Familiarity with Tasks	4.0	0.66

Reduction in Cognitive Load	4.3	0.60
Improvement in Performance	4.1	0.62

Simultaneously, Table 2 presents the findings related to distributed practice. Overall, learners reported that spreading task repetitions over time resulted in significant improvements in their engagement (M=4.3, SD=0.62) and metacognitive judgement (M=4.4, SD=0.59). Learners also reported that distributed practice helped maintain their interest (M=4.2, SD=0.63) and prevent cognitive fatigue (M=4.1, SD=0.70). These findings corroborate with qualitative insights from the interviews, where learners often highlighted the positive impact of distributed practice on their ability to plan (M=4.3, SD=0.68), monitor (M=4.3, SD=0.69), and evaluate their learning (M=4.2, SD=0.71), suggesting a strong influence on their metacognitive skills.

Table 2
 Learners' Perception of Distributed Practice

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Improvement in Engagement	4.3	0.62
Enhancement of Metacognitive Judgement	4.4	0.59
Maintenance of Interest	4.2	0.63
Prevention of Cognitive Fatigue	4.1	0.70
Improvement in Planning	4.3	0.68
Improvement in Monitoring	4.3	0.69
Improvement in Evaluation	4.2	0.71

These findings offer robust support for the perceived benefits of both task repetition and distributed practice among English language learners. This perspective complements previous research in cognitive psychology and applied linguistics, emphasising the practical significance of these strategies in real-world language learning environments. Further qualitative examination of the think-aloud protocols and interviews will help provide a richer understanding of these perceptions.

Discussion

The discussion of a study at hand presents the interpretation of the results and the way they relate to the reviewed literature at the beginning of the study. The present study will establish the perceptions of English learners regarding task repetition and the possible effect on engagement and metacognitive judgment due to the distributed practice. Generally, the results are positively perceived about task repetition and distributed practice, which apparently show that there is an existing general belief in these two strategies being effective language learning pedagogy. Task repetition, therefore, has been proved an amicable strategy to learners, as evidenced in the existing previous literature (Bygate, 2001; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). As indicated in Table 1, the various items had mean scores that ranged from strong agreement to agreement by the respondents on a need to repeat the task to help consolidate learning (M=4.2, SD=0.71) and to help them improve proficiency in language (M=4.1, SD=0.71). This would seem, hence, to support the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), which posits that interaction, through repetition in service of all others,

serves to internalise language rules and is beneficial to more proficient use of the language. This response pattern reflects that task repetition allows learners to have the chance of producing, refining, and consolidating their language skills for proficiency. Moreover, task repetition showed an increase in familiarity with the language tasks ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.66$), decrease in cognitive load ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.60$), and improved performance ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.62$). This was in line with Sweller (1988) in his Cognitive Load Theory, whereby he posits that a reduction in the cognitive load may when learners repeat these tasks, they get to be familiar with the structure and content of the tasks. This familiarity will reduce the cognitive demands of the task, and learners will consequently be more available to attend to language form and meaning. That is to say, it is clear that the repetition of the task enhances, in general, the performance of learners regarding language. Although the benefit of task repetition for language learning is generally recognised, the current study adds a novel value in that it focuses on the perceptions of learners regarding this strategy. These perceptions become very important, as they give a view of the learners' experiences, the benefits, and challenges that may emerge due to the implementation of task repetition. This might enlighten educators in making pedagogical decisions. The results further found that the role of distributed practice enhanced learners' metacognitive judgment and motivation. The learners reported increased commitment to repetition of tasks over time ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.62$), maintained interest in doing the tasks well over time ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.63$), and avoided the experience of cognitive fatigue (The results of the current study highly match those of Cepeda et al. (2006) and Rohrer (2015), who assessed the benefits of distributed practice compared to massed practice. The benefit of avoiding cognitive fatigue and keeping the students' interest is, therefore, immense in language learning, as they can take a huge part in the motivation of students and keeping the students focused on the learning process, again, which is key issues in language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

More important, learners noted that distributed practice brought improvement in metacognitive judgment. They scored the improvement in planning ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.68$), monitoring ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.69$), and evaluating ($M=4.2$, $SD=0.71$) of their own learning. They underline that distributed practice plays its role in metacognitive skills promotion. Generally, metacognition has been perceived to be "thinking about thinking," where it refers to the capability of the learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning. It has been linked with the use of language. By implication, then, these results should mean that distributed practice is a valid pedagogical way of enhancing metacognitive judgment on the part of the language learner.

The results of the study, therefore, would reveal that both task repetition and distributed practice are highly regarded and viewed very positively by second language learners of English. The strategies have a contribution to making in concreting the learning, helping increase language proficiency, improving engagement, and contributing to metacognitive skills. This report contributes empirical support to the incorporation of task repetition and distributed practice in the teaching and learning context of English. There are, however, certainly some limitations that hold for this research, as with any other. One of the most serious limitations was, therefore, that the

sample was from English learners in the UK, and it was prudent to generalise the findings to other contexts or to languages different from English. Future research shall extend the application of such strategies into different learning contexts and to learners belonging to different proficiency groups. Longitudinal studies may provide insights into the impact of task repetition and distributed practice on the language learning outcome over a period. Moreover, the current study provides a lot for the field, as it fills those gaps identified in the existing literature; particularly, it provides learner perceptions regarding the use of task repetition and distributed practice and highlights them as possible strategies towards successful language learning.

Conclusion

The general perception from research into learners' perception of task repetition and distributed practice highlights that they both are effective strategies for the learners' engagement but more than that, for the met-lo/learn ability and metacognitive judgment. Repetition of tasks could be the much sought-after option, for it propels proficiency and supports solidified learning. Distributed practice is also pointed out as a method of making learners more involved and endowing them with abilities for metacognition as time goes on. These findings do add to this importance, focusing on learner attitudes toward language learning strategies and indicating effective task repetition, along with successful distributed practice, to be a significant contributor to language acquisition success.

As such, the present study would involve the use of survey questionnaires, along with think-aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews, in a bid to tap into the needed very in-depth information relating to the experiences of the students undergoing learning concerning the strategies. In this regard, the paper would present a mixed-methodology approach based on both quantitative and qualitative data to derive all the information regarding the learners' experience. However, the consensus of the benefits from task repetition and distributed practice by the participants did indicate that both approaches hold great potential for offering a more engaging and cognitively stimulating learning environment when these approaches are modified or tailored to the varied needs and preferences of the learners. In addition, it contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence that backs the integration of learners' perceptions in the design and implementation of language learning interventions. The very warm welcome to task repetition and distributed practice by the learners is a clear indication that when included in language teaching, they may indeed improve the learning experience to no small degree. However, the study acknowledges its limitation in scope, primarily focusing on English language learners within the UK.

Further studies should be replicated in other linguistic and cultural contexts and with learners of a different level of proficiency to test the universality and effectiveness in the world. Longitudinal research may also throw some light on their impact on language learning outcomes in the long run. This would further confirm the clear-cut role of learner perceptions toward the effectiveness of task repetition and spaced practice as strategies in language learning. A learner-centred approach,

wherein the experiences and attitudes of the learner toward language become the centre of focus, may serve to encourage greater or, perhaps, even more successful language learning experiences through the successful deployment of such strategies. Thus, educationists can improve student involvement in metacognitive skills and hence contribute far greater to the language education by the adaptation of teaching methods that are more preferred and needed by the learners.

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