THE ROLE OF METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DESIGN

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ABSTRACT
This research explores the role of metalinguistic awareness in English as a foreign language learning through a psycholinguistics perspective and analyzes its implications for curriculum design. Employing a qualitative approach with library research methods, this study synthesizes academic literature to understand dimensions of metalinguistic awareness including phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and orthographic awareness and their roles in cognitive processes of language learning. Findings indicate that metalinguistic awareness significantly correlates with language skills, particularly reading comprehension, and functions as a strong mediator in achieving linguistic competence. Learners with multilingual backgrounds demonstrate higher performance in metalinguistic awareness compared to monolingual learners. Practical implications suggest the necessity of systematic integration of metalinguistic awareness development activities in curriculum through active learning approaches, utilization of learning technologies, and consideration of multilingual contexts. This research contributes theoretically to enriching applied psycholinguistics literature and offers practical guidance for curriculum developers to design learning programs responsive to learners' cognitive needs by positioning metalinguistic awareness as a core component of English language competence development.

Keywords: *Curriculum design, English language learning, metalinguistic awareness*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia faces complex challenges that are not only related to the mastery of linguistic skills, but also involve deep cognitive processes that affect the effectiveness of language acquisition. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly crucial given the

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global demands that learners not only be able to communicate, but have a strong metalinguistic understanding to consciously analyze, reflect, and manipulate language structures (Islam, 2021).

Metalinguistic awareness, which refers to learners' capacity to consciously reflect on, analyze, and manipulate the structural components of language, has been widely recognized as a crucial factor in successful second language learning. Through this awareness, learners are able to examine linguistic forms beyond surface-level use, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of how language operates at phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels. Despite its acknowledged importance, the systematic integration of metalinguistic awareness into curriculum design remains insufficient in many educational contexts, where instructional practices often prioritize communicative outcomes without explicitly supporting learners' cognitive engagement with language form. As a result, opportunities for learners to develop reflective language awareness as part of their learning trajectory are frequently underutilized. However, research linking metalinguistic awareness with practical implications for the design of English learning curriculum is limited, especially in the context of Indonesia, which has the unique characteristics of being a multilingual country with a mother tongue whose structure is far different from English (Asih Prihandini, 2025).

A review of the literature shows that metalinguistic awareness encompasses a wide range of dimensions, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic awareness, each of which contributes to language competence holistically. Previous research indicates that learners with high levels of metalinguistic awareness tend to be more effective in detecting errors, understanding linguistic ambiguity, and applying corrective strategies in their own language production, thus accelerating the achievement of language accuracy and fluency (Scott, 2024). In addition, modern psycholinguistics approaches emphasize the importance of understanding the language processing mechanisms in the learner's brain, including how metalinguistic awareness interacts with working memory, selective attention, and executive function to support more efficient learning. However, there is a significant research gap in the literature on how these theoretical findings can be translated into applicable and contextual curriculum design principles. The current English curriculum generally still focuses on conventional communicative approaches without systematically integrating activities specifically designed to develop learners' metalinguistic awareness (Inoko Hikmasari, 2020).

The novelty of this research lies in the effort to build an integrative theoretical framework that connects the construct of metalinguistic consciousness from a psycholinguistics perspective with the principles of evidence-based curriculum design, as well as offering concrete recommendations for implementation in the context of learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Based on this background, the formulation of this research problem includes how metalinguistic awareness plays a role in

the English language learning process from a psycholinguistics perspective, what dimensions of metalinguistic awareness are most relevant to be developed in the context of foreign languages, and how these theoretical implications can be transformed into effective curriculum design elements (A. S. A. Lestari, 2025).

The aim of this study is to analyze in depth the role of metalinguistic awareness in English language learning from a psycholinguistics perspective, with particular attention to how learners consciously reflect on, monitor, and regulate linguistic forms and processes during language acquisition. By situating metalinguistic awareness within established psycholinguistics theories of language processing, attention, and cognitive control, this study seeks to explain how such awareness facilitates learners' ability to notice linguistic patterns, resolve ambiguity, and transfer linguistic knowledge across contexts. Furthermore, the study endeavors to formulate concrete pedagogical implications for the development of an English language curriculum that is responsive to learners' cognitive characteristics, developmental stages, and learning constraints. The expected contributions of this research are twofold. Theoretically, it aims to enrich the body of applied psycholinguistics literature by providing a systematic and empirically grounded account of the cognitive mechanisms underlying metalinguistic awareness and its function in second language learning. Practically, the findings are intended to offer evidence-based guidance for curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers in designing English language learning programs that more effectively integrate metalinguistic awareness as a core curricular component, thereby promoting deeper linguistic understanding, learner autonomy, and sustainable language development across educational contexts.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design or literature study that aims to explore in depth the role of metalinguistic awareness in learning English as a foreign language through comprehensive literature analysis from various reliable scientific sources. The library research method was chosen because it allows researchers to perform theoretical synthesis of complex psycholinguistics concepts and identify their implications for curriculum design through a systematic review of relevant previous research findings (Novika, 2025). The qualitative approach in this study facilitates a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of metalinguistic awareness by exploring the meanings, interpretations, and contexts behind various theoretical perspectives and pedagogical practices that have been documented in the academic literature.

The data sources of this study comprise peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, authoritative textbooks, conference proceedings, and other credible academic publications published within the last five years to ensure the timeliness and relevance of the information examined. These sources were selected to capture recent theoretical developments, empirical findings, and

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methodological approaches related to metalinguistic awareness and its role in English language learning. Emphasis was placed on publications indexed in reputable databases to maintain academic rigor and reliability. The use of diverse source types allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic by integrating theoretical discussions, empirical evidence, and applied perspectives from the fields of psycholinguistics, second language acquisition, and curriculum studies.

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic and structured search of major electronic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and SpringerLink. Specific keywords and combinations of terms such as metalinguistic awareness, psycholinguistics, English as a foreign language, curriculum design, and second language acquisition were employed to ensure focused and relevant retrieval of sources. Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to refine the selection process. Publications were included if they explicitly addressed metalinguistic awareness within foreign or second language learning contexts, adopted a psycholinguistics perspective, or discussed pedagogical and curricular implications. Conversely, sources were excluded if they lacked direct relevance to the research objectives, were methodologically weak, or did not meet established academic credibility standards. This rigorous selection procedure was intended to ensure the validity, coherence, and scholarly value of the data analyzed in this study.

The data analysis technique employed in this study is content analysis, which involves a systematic and rigorous process of identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing the principal themes emerging from the selected body of literature. This analytical approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to examine patterns of meaning, theoretical orientations, and empirical trends across diverse sources in a structured manner. The analysis was conducted through several interrelated stages. First, all selected publications were read comprehensively to develop a holistic understanding of their scope, arguments, and findings. This initial reading was followed by the identification of key concepts and recurring issues related to metalinguistic awareness and psycholinguistics, particularly those addressing cognitive processes, language awareness, and their roles in English as a foreign language learning. Subsequently, the identified concepts were organized and categorized according to relevant theoretical dimensions, allowing similarities, differences, and relationships among studies to be systematically mapped.

The final stage of analysis involved an integrative synthesis of the categorized findings to construct a coherent conceptual framework that explains the implications of metalinguistic awareness for curriculum design. Throughout this process, triangulation was applied by comparing and contrasting perspectives, methodologies, and conclusions across multiple sources in order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the interpretations generated (Rahmasari et al., 2025). This comparative procedure helped minimize potential bias and ensured that the resulting analysis was grounded

in a balanced representation of the literature. Overall, the analysis was carried out in a reflective and iterative manner, in which emerging interpretations were continuously revisited and refined in light of new insights from the data. As a result, the findings of this study go beyond mere description by offering critical and analytical engagement with existing research, thereby contributing meaningful theoretical insights and practical recommendations for the development of English as a foreign language learning from a curriculum perspective.

Consequently, the findings of this study extend beyond a purely descriptive synthesis of previous research by offering a critical and analytical engagement with key issues surrounding metalinguistic awareness and English as a foreign language learning. The analysis highlights underlying patterns, theoretical implications, and pedagogical gaps that are not always explicitly addressed in individual studies. In doing so, it contributes meaningful theoretical insights to the field while also generating practical recommendations for curriculum development that are informed by psycholinguistics principles. These contributions are expected to support the design of more cognitively responsive English language learning curricula and to inform future research and educational practice in a systematic and evidence-based manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The Role of Metalinguistic Awareness in English Language Learning from a Psycholinguistics Perspective

Metalinguistic awareness plays a fundamental role in the process of learning English as a foreign language by involving various cognitive dimensions that interact with each other in a complex way. Based on the literature analysis, it was found that metalinguistic awareness includes the ability of learners to explicitly reflect on and manipulate the components of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and orthography. In the context of psycholinguistics, this ability has to do not only with declarative knowledge of language rules, but also involves deep cognitive processes that include working memory, selective attention, and processing of linguistic information at the neural level (Mokodompit et al., 2025).

Research shows that strengthening learners' understanding of language structures through metalinguistic awareness activities significantly helps in developing better oral reading fluency, as learners are able to identify and analyze linguistic patterns systematically. The psycholinguistics perspective emphasizes that language learning is inseparable from the cognitive processes that occur in the learner's brain, including how linguistic information is processed, stored in memory, and re-accessed when needed in language production. The cognitive process in language acquisition involves various stages ranging from linguistic input, processing at various levels of awareness, to language output that reflects the learner's level of metalinguistic competence (Hadyah J. Salman, 2022).

Dimensions of Metalinguistic Consciousness

The most relevant dimensions of metalinguistic awareness to develop in learning English as a foreign language include several crucial aspects that complement each other. First, orthographic awareness that focuses on the ability to recognize and correct errors in writing academic words becomes very important, especially as learners show varying levels of awareness ranging from intuition, attention to errors, meta-awareness, to understanding of underlying rules. Factors that affect this orthographic awareness include the learner's linguistic background, the level of exposure to English, and the academic experience they have had (Hanaa ElSayed Imam Ali, 2025).

Second, grammatical awareness that allows learners to identify and correct sentence structure errors in their writing. Research shows that the use of online feedback tools such as Grammarly can effectively facilitate the development of grammatical awareness by providing direct corrections that help learners understand their mistakes and correct them independently, thereby increasing metalinguistic awareness as well as learning independence. Third, metalinguistic awareness in a multilingual context suggests that learners with multilingual backgrounds tend to perform higher on metalinguistic awareness tests compared to monolingual learners, after controlling for grade-level variables and academic achievement. This indicates that language experience in multiple languages provides a cognitive advantage in developing the ability to explicitly reflect on language structures (Hidayatun et al., 2021).

The relationship between metalinguistic awareness and other language skills also shows a significant correlation, particularly in the context of reading comprehension. Regression analysis conducted on metalinguistic awareness data and reading comprehension scores revealed a direct contribution of metalinguistic awareness to reading comprehension in English, as well as an indirect contribution mediated through academic achievement. Interestingly, metalinguistic awareness has been shown to be a more powerful mediator than academic achievement in influencing reading comprehension ability, indicating that the ability to explicitly reflect on and analyze language structures has a more substantial impact on literacy competence in foreign languages (History, 2023).

These findings reinforce the argument that metalinguistic awareness is not just additional knowledge, but rather a core component that supports the holistic development of language skills. Learners who had the ability to identify various components of metalinguistic awareness showed better performance in overall language skills, although there was still variation in mastery levels among non-native learners (V. A. Lestari et al., 2025).

In a more specific learning context, metalinguistic awareness also plays an important role in overcoming learning difficulties that students experience when learning complex linguistic concepts. Factors that cause these difficulties include the abstract nature of the material, the use of unfamiliar technical terminology, and the lack of connection between theory

and practical application in everyday language. Therefore, the development of metalinguistic awareness serves not only as a tool to improve language skills, but also as a cognitive bridge that facilitates the understanding of theoretical linguistic concepts. The integration of technology in metalinguistic learning activities, such as the use of visually appealing infographics, has been shown to be effective in increasing learning engagement and learner motivation, particularly for those who have difficulty reading (Mokodompit et al., 2025).

Implications for English Learning Curriculum Design

Theoretical findings on the role of metalinguistic awareness have significant practical implications for the design of the English as a foreign language learning curriculum. First, the curriculum needs to systematically integrate activities specifically designed to develop metalinguistic awareness in various linguistic dimensions. One of the main challenges faced by students in learning linguistics is the highly theoretical and abstract nature of the material, with the use of complex technical terms and the lack of a direct relationship between theory and practical application in everyday life. Therefore, active learning approaches such as Problem-Based Learning and interactive discussions have proven to be effective in increasing student participation and helping them connect linguistic theory with everyday language practice (Simatupang & Tanjung, 2025).

Second, The integration of technology into the learning process represents an important strategy for facilitating the development of metalinguistic awareness in English language education. Technological tools such as the International Phonetic Alphabet, language analysis software, and online feedback platforms provide learners with concrete and visual representations of abstract linguistic features, enabling them to examine language forms with greater precision. Through interactive interfaces and immediate feedback, these technologies support learners in noticing phonological, grammatical, and lexical patterns, thereby enhancing their ability to reflect on and analyze language structures in a more engaging and cognitively accessible manner. In addition, the use of technology encourages learner autonomy by allowing students to explore linguistic concepts independently and at their own pace, which is essential for the gradual development of metalinguistic awareness. Thus, curriculum design that is responsive to learners' cognitive needs and integrates the development of metalinguistic awareness as a core component will result in more effective learning, not only theoretical but also relevant to learners' hands-on experience and practical needs in developing their English language competencies (Walla, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that metalinguistic awareness plays a crucial role in learning English as a foreign language through the involvement of complex cognitive processes that include the ability to explicitly reflect and manipulate language structures. From a psycholinguistics perspective, metalinguistic

awareness that includes phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and orthographic dimensions has been shown to contribute significantly to the development of language skills holistically, particularly in improving reading comprehension, oral reading fluency, and academic writing accuracy. The study also identified that learners with multilingual backgrounds showed superiority in metalinguistic awareness over monolingual learners, indicating the importance of utilizing cross-linguistic positive transfer in the learning process. The practical implications for curriculum design show the need for the systematic integration of applicable metalinguistic activities, the use of technology as a learning mediator, and the application of active learning approaches such as Problem-Based Learning to connect linguistic theory with everyday language practice. By integrating the development of metalinguistic awareness as a core component of the curriculum, English language learning can become more effective, responsive to learners' cognitive needs, and able to produce language competencies that are not only communicative but also analytical and reflective.

Moreover, the findings reveal that learners with multilingual backgrounds generally exhibit higher levels of metalinguistic awareness than their monolingual counterparts, highlighting the value of positive cross-linguistic transfer in language learning. Existing knowledge of more than one language appears to enhance learners' sensitivity to linguistic patterns and facilitate deeper engagement with the target language. In terms of curricular implications, the study emphasizes the importance of systematically embedding metalinguistic-oriented activities, integrating technology as a supportive learning tool, and implementing active learning approaches such as Problem-Based Learning to link theoretical linguistic knowledge with practical language use. By positioning metalinguistic awareness as a central element within the curriculum, English language instruction can become more cognitively attuned to learners' needs and capable of fostering language abilities that are not only communicative but also analytical and reflective.

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