

ANALYZING METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC FRAMEWORK AND CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

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Abstrak - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesadaran metalinguistik dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing dari perspektif psikolinguistik serta mengkaji implikasinya terhadap desain kurikulum Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi pustaka yang mensintesis berbagai literatur teoretis dan empiris terkini untuk memahami peran kesadaran metalinguistik sebagai mekanisme kognitif dalam pemerolehan bahasa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran metalinguistik memiliki peran sentral dalam memungkinkan pembelajar untuk secara sadar merefleksikan, menganalisis, dan memanipulasi struktur bahasa yang mencakup aspek fonologis, morfologis, sintaksis, dan pragmatik. Dari perspektif psikolinguistik, kesadaran ini berkaitan erat dengan proses kognitif seperti perhatian, memori kerja, dan pemrosesan bahasa yang mendukung efektivitas pembelajaran. Selain itu, integrasi kesadaran metalinguistik dalam praktik pembelajaran terbukti dapat meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa, kemandirian belajar, serta kemampuan analitis peserta didik. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya integrasi sistematis kesadaran metalinguistik dalam kurikulum melalui pendekatan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik serta pemanfaatan teknologi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam pengembangan kerangka kurikulum EFL berbasis psikolinguistik yang mendukung pemahaman bahasa yang lebih mendalam dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Kesadaran Metalinguistik; Psikolinguistik; Pembelajaran EFL; Desain Kurikulum; Pemerolehan Bahasa.

Abstract - This study aims to analyze metalinguistic awareness in foreign language learning from a psycholinguistic perspective and examine its implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum design. Employing a qualitative approach with a library research design, this study synthesizes recent theoretical and empirical literature to explore how metalinguistic awareness functions as a cognitive mechanism in language acquisition. The findings indicate that metalinguistic awareness plays a central role in enabling learners to consciously reflect on, analyze, and manipulate linguistic structures across multiple dimensions, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this awareness is closely linked to cognitive processes such as attention, working memory, and language processing, which support more effective learning outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlights that integrating metalinguistic awareness into instructional practices enhances learners' language proficiency, autonomy, and analytical abilities. In terms of curriculum implications, the study emphasizes the need for systematic integration of metalinguistic awareness through learner-centered approaches and technology-enhanced learning. This research contributes to the development of a psycholinguistically informed framework for EFL curriculum design that promotes deeper linguistic understanding and sustainable language development.

Keywords: Metalinguistic Awareness; Psycholinguistics; EFL Learning; Curriculum Design; Language Acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning, particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, presents multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the mere acquisition of linguistic competencies to encompass complex cognitive mechanisms that shape the effectiveness of language development. In the context of increasing global demands, learners are expected not only to achieve communicative proficiency but also to demonstrate a heightened level of

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metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to consciously analyze, evaluate, and manipulate linguistic structures (Fauziyah et al., 2023; Xu & Margeviča-Grinberga, 2021; Wijewantha, 2021). This shift underscores the need to reconceptualize language learning as a cognitively mediated process rather than solely a communicative endeavor.

Metalinguistic awareness, broadly defined as learners' ability to reflect upon and regulate the formal properties of language, has been consistently identified as a pivotal determinant of successful second and foreign language acquisition (Vuong thi hai et al., 2025; Mustamir, 2024; Tran et al., 2024). This construct facilitates deeper engagement with language at multiple levels, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic domains, thereby allowing learners to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward a more analytical and flexible command of language systems. Learners equipped with strong metalinguistic awareness are more adept at identifying linguistic patterns, resolving ambiguity, and applying self-corrective strategies, which ultimately enhances both accuracy and fluency in language use (Crossley, 2020; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2020).

Despite its recognized importance, the incorporation of metalinguistic awareness into EFL curriculum design remains limited and often implicit. Many instructional frameworks continue to prioritize communicative competence without systematically fostering learners' reflective engagement with linguistic form (Hidayat et al., 2024; Simatupang, 2020). Consequently, opportunities to cultivate higher-order cognitive processes related to language awareness are frequently overlooked, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Indonesia, where significant structural differences between the first language and English may further complicate acquisition processes (de Diego-Lázaro, 2022; Irvan, 2024; Mckinney et al., 2024).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, metalinguistic awareness is closely linked to core cognitive functions, including working memory, attentional control, and executive functioning, which collectively influence how learners process, store, and retrieve linguistic information (Makhammdovna & Agzamova, 2021; Al-Bahadli et al., 2023). Contemporary psycholinguistic theories emphasize that language learning involves dynamic interactions between implicit and explicit knowledge systems, with metalinguistic awareness serving as a bridge that enables learners to consciously access and manipulate linguistic representations (Ellis, 2017). However, a critical gap persists in translating these theoretical insights into pedagogically viable and context-sensitive curriculum models.

Existing literature indicates that metalinguistic awareness encompasses several interrelated dimensions phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic awareness each contributing to holistic language competence (Rehman et al., 2025; Lampropoulos et al., 2022; Kim, 2024). Nevertheless, there remains insufficient empirical and conceptual exploration of how these dimensions can be systematically integrated into curriculum design to support meaningful learning outcomes, particularly within EFL settings in Indonesia. Current curricular practices tend to rely on conventional communicative approaches that inadequately address the cognitive underpinnings of language acquisition, thereby limiting learners' potential to develop deeper linguistic insight (Thi & Que, 2025; Tristiana et al., 2024; Becerra-Posada et al., 2022).

In response to these gaps, this study proposes an integrative psycholinguistic framework that situates metalinguistic awareness as a central construct in foreign language learning and links

it to evidence-based principles of curriculum development. The research seeks to address three primary questions: (1) how metalinguistic awareness functions within the language learning process from a psycholinguistic standpoint; (2) which dimensions of metalinguistic awareness are most critical for development in foreign language contexts; and (3) how these theoretical constructs can be operationalized into effective and contextually relevant curriculum design elements.

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of metalinguistic awareness in foreign language learning by examining how learners consciously monitor, regulate, and refine their linguistic knowledge during the acquisition process. By grounding the analysis in established psycholinguistic theories of language processing, attention, and cognitive control, this study aims to elucidate the mechanisms through which metalinguistic awareness facilitates noticing, pattern recognition, and knowledge transfer across linguistic contexts (Schmidt et al., 2018; Robinson, 2019).

The expected contributions of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it seeks to advance the field of applied psycholinguistics by offering a systematic account of the cognitive processes underlying metalinguistic awareness and its role in language acquisition. Practically, the findings are intended to inform curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers in designing EFL programs that explicitly integrate metalinguistic awareness as a core component. Such integration is anticipated to foster deeper linguistic understanding, enhance learner autonomy, and support sustainable language development across diverse educational contexts.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a library research design to examine metalinguistic awareness in foreign language learning from a psycholinguistic perspective. This approach enables a systematic synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature to explore how cognitive processes such as attention, working memory, and language monitoring interact with metalinguistic awareness in shaping language acquisition (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ellis, 2015). A qualitative framework is particularly suitable for interpreting abstract constructs and uncovering deeper conceptual relationships across psycholinguistics, second language acquisition, and curriculum studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Neuman, 2019; Tisdell et al., 2025).

The data sources consist of recent peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings obtained from reputable databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and SpringerLink. The selection process was guided by specific keywords such as *metalinguistic awareness*, *psycholinguistics*, *EFL*, and *curriculum design*, alongside clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and academic rigor (Mauliddiyah, 2021; Anufia, 2019). Only studies that explicitly addressed metalinguistic awareness within foreign or second language contexts and demonstrated strong methodological credibility were included in the analysis.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify, categorize, and synthesize key themes related to metalinguistic awareness and its pedagogical implications (Patton, 2020). The analysis involved iterative reading, thematic coding, and conceptual categorization, followed by an integrative synthesis to construct a coherent psycholinguistic framework for curriculum design. Triangulation across multiple sources was applied to enhance validity and minimize bias (Rheindorf, 2022). Ultimately, this study provides a

critical and analytical synthesis that informs the development of more cognitively responsive EFL curricula grounded in metalinguistic awareness and psycholinguistic principles (Richards & Schmidt, 2017).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Metalinguistic Awareness in Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Framework

Metalinguistic awareness constitutes a central cognitive construct in foreign language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it involves multiple interrelated dimensions that operate in a complex and dynamic manner. Based on the literature, this construct refers to learners' ability to consciously reflect upon, analyze, and manipulate linguistic elements, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and orthographic components. From a psycholinguistic perspective, such competence extends beyond the mere acquisition of declarative knowledge of language rules and encompasses deeper cognitive processes, including working memory, attentional control, and the neural processing of linguistic information (Bialystok, 2001; Field, 2004; Mokodompit et al., 2025). These processes enable learners to engage in analytical thinking about language, thereby fostering more flexible and accurate language use.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the development of metalinguistic awareness contributes significantly to learners' language proficiency, particularly in enhancing reading fluency, comprehension, and overall accuracy. Through engagement in metalinguistic activities, learners are better equipped to identify linguistic patterns, detect errors, and apply systematic strategies in processing and producing language (Rakab, 2022; Sifakis, 2023). Within a psycholinguistic framework, language learning is understood as a cognitively mediated process in which linguistic input is encoded, processed, stored, and retrieved through the interaction of memory systems and attentional resources. This perspective highlights the essential role of conscious awareness in facilitating effective language acquisition and performance.

Language acquisition further involves a multi-stage cognitive process, beginning with exposure to linguistic input, followed by varying levels of processing and awareness, and culminating in language output that reflects the learner's degree of metalinguistic competence (Hasbullah et al., 2023; Yount, 2023). Higher levels of awareness enable learners to notice linguistic features, test hypotheses, and engage in self-monitoring during communication. Accordingly, integrating metalinguistic awareness into foreign language instruction is crucial not only for improving linguistic outcomes but also for informing the design of cognitively responsive and evidence-based curricula that align with psycholinguistic principles and support sustainable language development (Makhammdovna & Agzamova, 2021; Al-Bahadli et al., 2023).

Dimensions of Metalinguistic Awareness in Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Perspective

Metalinguistic awareness in foreign language learning encompasses several interrelated dimensions that collectively contribute to learners' cognitive and linguistic development. One of the most salient dimensions is orthographic awareness, which refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, and correct written language forms. This dimension is particularly critical in EFL contexts, where learners demonstrate varying levels of awareness ranging from intuitive recognition of errors to more advanced rule-based understanding of spelling conventions and writing systems. Research indicates that orthographic awareness is influenced by multiple factors, including learners' first language background, frequency of

exposure to English, and prior academic experience (Al-Omari & Singh, 2023). From a psycholinguistic standpoint, this dimension involves the interaction between visual processing systems and long-term memory representations of written language.

Another essential dimension is grammatical awareness, which enables learners to identify, analyze, and correct syntactic and morphological errors in language production. Empirical studies suggest that technology-mediated tools, such as automated feedback systems, can significantly support the development of grammatical awareness by providing immediate and explicit corrective input that promotes self-regulation and independent learning (Muhtar et al., 2021). This aligns with psycholinguistic theories emphasizing the role of feedback and noticing in facilitating language acquisition (Rao & Ibrahim, 2025). In addition, evidence from multilingual contexts demonstrates that learners with experience in multiple languages tend to exhibit higher levels of metalinguistic awareness compared to monolingual peers, as multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and the ability to reflect explicitly on language structures.

The relationship between metalinguistic awareness and broader language competencies is particularly evident in reading comprehension and overall literacy development. Studies have shown that metalinguistic awareness contributes both directly and indirectly to reading comprehension, often serving as a stronger predictor than general academic achievement due to its role in enabling learners to analyze linguistic structures and resolve ambiguity (Rakab, 2022). This underscores its function as a foundational component of language proficiency rather than a supplementary skill. Furthermore, metalinguistic awareness plays a crucial role in addressing learning difficulties associated with abstract linguistic concepts, unfamiliar terminology, and the disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. In this regard, it acts as a cognitive bridge that facilitates deeper conceptual understanding. The integration of multimodal and technology-enhanced instructional strategies such as visual representations and interactive learning tools has also been shown to enhance learner engagement and support the development of metalinguistic awareness, particularly among learners with diverse cognitive needs (Sifakis, 2023). Collectively, these findings highlight the necessity of systematically incorporating multiple dimensions of metalinguistic awareness into foreign language curricula to foster more effective and cognitively grounded learning outcomes.

Curriculum Implications for Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Perspective

Insights derived from psycholinguistic research on metalinguistic awareness offer substantial implications for the design of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula. A primary consideration is the need to systematically embed instructional practices that explicitly cultivate metalinguistic awareness across diverse linguistic domains. In many educational contexts, learners encounter difficulties due to the abstract and highly theoretical nature of linguistic content, often compounded by dense technical terminology and a limited connection between conceptual knowledge and authentic language use. To address this gap, the adoption of learner-centered and cognitively engaging pedagogies such as Problem-Based Learning, inquiry-driven tasks, and collaborative discourse has been shown to enhance learner participation and facilitate the meaningful integration of linguistic theory with practical communication (Simatupang, 2020). These approaches are consistent with psycholinguistic principles that emphasize active cognitive processing and meaningful interaction as essential conditions for effective language acquisition.

Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies represents a crucial strategy for supporting the development of metalinguistic awareness in contemporary language education. Tools such as phonetic systems like the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), corpus-based language analysis software, and automated feedback platforms provide learners with concrete and multimodal representations of abstract linguistic features. Through interactive interfaces and immediate corrective feedback, these technologies facilitate the noticing of phonological, grammatical, and lexical patterns, thereby strengthening learners' analytical and reflective capacities (Chapelle & Shannon, 2017). From a psycholinguistic standpoint, such tools enhance attention allocation and support the encoding and retrieval of linguistic information, which are critical processes in language learning (Schmidt et al., 2018). Additionally, technology-enhanced learning environments promote learner autonomy by enabling individualized exploration and self-paced engagement with linguistic content.

Ultimately, curriculum frameworks that position metalinguistic awareness as a central component rather than a peripheral outcome are more likely to produce meaningful and sustainable learning gains. By integrating explicit reflection on language form with communicative practice, such curricula bridge the divide between theoretical understanding and practical application. This alignment not only improves learners' linguistic accuracy and fluency but also fosters higher-order cognitive skills, including critical thinking and self-regulation (Nation & Macalister, 2019). Therefore, the incorporation of psycholinguistically informed principles into curriculum design is essential for developing EFL programs that are cognitively responsive, pedagogically effective, and aligned with the evolving demands of global language use (Walla, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that metalinguistic awareness plays a central and indispensable role in foreign language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it is deeply connected to key psycholinguistic processes such as attention, working memory, and language processing. The findings reveal that learners with well-developed metalinguistic awareness demonstrate a stronger ability to analyze linguistic structures, detect patterns, and regulate their own language use, which significantly enhances their overall language proficiency. Moreover, metalinguistic awareness emerges as a multidimensional construct encompassing orthographic, grammatical, phonological, and pragmatic dimensions, all of which contribute holistically to language competence. Importantly, this study positions metalinguistic awareness not as an auxiliary skill but as a core cognitive mechanism that underpins effective and meaningful language acquisition.

From a practical standpoint, these findings imply that EFL curriculum design must move beyond a predominantly communicative orientation and systematically integrate metalinguistic awareness as a central instructional component. Curriculum developers and educators are encouraged to incorporate cognitively engaging and learner-centered approaches, such as problem-based learning, reflective language analysis, and technology-enhanced instruction, to facilitate deeper interaction with linguistic forms. The use of digital tools that provide immediate feedback and visual representations of language structures can further strengthen learners' analytical abilities and promote autonomous learning. By aligning curriculum design with psycholinguistic principles, educational practices can become more responsive to learners' cognitive needs, thereby fostering more effective, meaningful, and sustainable language development.

Nevertheless, this study also highlights several avenues for future research. Empirical investigations are needed to validate the proposed conceptual framework in diverse educational settings, particularly through experimental and longitudinal designs that examine the direct impact of metalinguistic awareness-based instruction on language outcomes. Future studies should also explore how individual differences such as age, proficiency level, and multilingual background influence the development of metalinguistic awareness. In addition, further research is required to design and evaluate innovative instructional models and digital learning tools that effectively integrate metalinguistic awareness into classroom practice. Such efforts will contribute to a more comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how psycholinguistic insights can be operationalized to enhance foreign language education in increasingly complex and multilingual contexts.

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