

## **Introduction to the Special Issue: Metacognition, Self-Regulation, and Self-Efficacy in Second and Foreign Language Learning**

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### **1 Background**

The landscape of second and foreign language learning is undergoing a profound transformation, shaped by advances in technology, evolving pedagogical paradigms, and an increasing recognition of learner diversity. Amid these changes, the constructs of metacognition, self-regulation, and self-efficacy have emerged as central to understanding and enhancing language learning outcomes. This special issue of the International Journal of TESOL Studies brings together cutting-edge research that explores these constructs in varied contexts, employing diverse methodologies to illuminate their roles in language development, learner autonomy, and academic achievement. The collected works not only deepen our theoretical understanding but also offer practical insights for educators and curriculum designers seeking to foster more effective, autonomous, and resilient language learners.

### **2 Introduction to the articles**

The opening article of this special issue is Teng (2025), which is set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that necessitated a sudden shift to online education and exposed language learners to a host of cognitive and emotional challenges, such as feelings of isolation, heightened anxiety, and diminished engagement. Teng's research investigates how learners navigate these difficulties by employing metacognitive strategies, and examines the evolution of their self-efficacy over time. The study also explores the dynamic interplay between learners' motivation and their perception of progress in an online English learning environment. The results reveal a reciprocal relationship between metacognitive strategy use and self-efficacy: as learners become more adept at managing their own learning processes, their confidence grows, and vice versa. Notably, the use of metacognitive strategies emerges as a predictor of both motivation and perceived progress, suggesting that when students actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, they are more likely to feel motivated and recognize improvement. In turn, heightened motivation significantly influences both self-efficacy and perceived progress, underscoring motivation's foundational role in the online language learning process. Interestingly, while perceived progress is shaped by these other factors, it does not serve as a driving force among them within the scope of this study. These findings point to the importance of intentionally cultivating metacognitive awareness, self-efficacy, and motivation in online English courses.

Ortovero et al. (2025) investigate the impact of a Self-Regulated Multimedia Cognitive Learning Model on vocabulary acquisition among adult English learners. The study demonstrates that integrating

metacognitive strategy training with multimedia resources not only improves vocabulary retention but also fosters learners' confidence in their ability to manage their own learning. By encouraging reflection on strategy use and providing opportunities for self-assessment, the intervention promotes a deeper engagement with language input and output. They called for a need for self-regulated multimedia cognitive learning model to improve second language learning and the college success rates of English Learners in the United States.

Molnar (2025) delves into the specific self-regulated learning strategies used by students in an online asynchronous EFL classroom in Japan. The qualitative analysis uncovers a rich repertoire of strategies, including time management, resource selection, self-questioning, and peer collaboration. Notably, students who actively engaged in self-monitoring and self-evaluation reported higher satisfaction and better learning outcomes. The study also highlights the challenges faced by learners, such as procrastination and difficulties in maintaining motivation, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that address both cognitive and affective dimensions of self-regulation.

Shen and Tao (2025) investigate the interplay between metacognitive strategies, AI-based writing self-efficacy, and writing anxiety in AI-assisted writing contexts. The study finds that students who possess strong metacognitive skills are more likely to develop high writing self-efficacy, which in turn reduces writing anxiety and enhances performance. The integration of AI tools is shown to provide valuable feedback and scaffolding, but the benefits are maximized when learners are explicitly taught how to use these tools strategically and reflectively.

Liu and Zhang (2025) explore the relationship between new media literacy, critical thinking, and learner confidence. The study finds that students who are adept at navigating digital environments and evaluating information critically are more likely to feel confident in their language abilities. This confidence, in turn, enhances their willingness to take risks, experiment with new strategies, and engage actively in learning. The findings underscore the importance of integrating digital literacy and critical thinking instruction into language curricula, particularly in an era characterized by information overload and rapidly evolving technologies.

Park et al. (2025) examine the impact of resilience and self-regulation on L2 proficiency among ESL learners. The findings indicate that self-efficacy acts as a motivational engine, driving learners to persist in the face of challenges and to adopt adaptive coping strategies. Resilient learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in self-regulated learning behaviors, leading to higher language proficiency and greater overall well-being.

The systematic review by Ueno et al. (2025) provides a comprehensive overview of the state of research on self-regulated learning (SRL) and metacognition in second and foreign language contexts. The review highlights a shift from viewing metacognition as a static trait to understanding it as a dynamic set of skills that can be explicitly taught and cultivated. Key findings from the review indicate that metacognitive strategy instruction—such as training learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension and production—significantly enhances language proficiency and learner autonomy. The review also underscores the importance of transfer: learners who develop metacognitive skills in one domain (e.g., reading) are better able to apply those skills across other domains (e.g., writing or speaking), suggesting that metacognitive training has far-reaching benefits beyond isolated tasks.

The importance of self-regulation is further underscored in Adiyono et al. (2025), which examines the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between self-regulated learning, family support, and academic procrastination among Indonesian EFL learners. The study finds that students with higher levels of self-regulation and perceived family support are less likely to procrastinate, and that self-efficacy plays a crucial mediating role in this relationship. These findings point to the interconnectedness of cognitive, motivational, and social factors in shaping learners' self-regulatory capacities.

Sasaki and Takeuchi (2025) explore the transition from other-regulation (external guidance by teachers or peers) to self-regulation in e-learning environments among Japanese learners. The study reveals that while external regulation is often necessary in the initial stages of online learning, scaffolding strategies—such as prompting learners to set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect on outcomes—can facilitate the gradual

internalization of self-regulatory behaviors. The findings suggest that effective e-learning design should strike a balance between providing support and fostering independence, gradually reducing external scaffolds as learners gain confidence and competence.

### 3 Conclusion

The studies featured in this special issue collectively advance our understanding of metacognition, self-regulation, and self-efficacy in second and foreign language learning. They illuminate the intricate interplay between cognitive, motivational, social, and technological factors in shaping learner outcomes. Most importantly, they underscore the imperative for language educators to move beyond a narrow focus on linguistic forms and to cultivate the broader capacities that enable learners to become strategic, autonomous, and confident users of language.

As the field continues to evolve, the challenge for researchers and practitioners alike is to harness these insights to design learning environments that empower all learners, regardless of background, proficiency, or context, to take charge of their own learning journeys. By fostering metacognitive awareness, self-regulatory skills, and self-efficacy beliefs, we can equip learners not only to succeed in language classrooms but also to navigate the complexities of communication in a globalized world.

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