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The Role of Applied Metalinguistic Awareness and English Language Teaching Strategies in Enhancing EFL Learners' Language Skills and Cognitive Skills

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ABSTRACT

Applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA) has gained increasing attention as an important component in foreign language education because it enables learners to consciously understand, analyze, and regulate their language use. This study aims to explore the role of AMA within ELT strategies and examine its contribution to EFL learners' linguistic and cognitive development in Indonesian and Thai contexts. A qualitative research design was employed involving 27 EFL learners, consisting of 14 Indonesian and 13 Thai learners. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings revealed five major patterns of AMA integration: explicit language reflection, metalinguistic corrective feedback, task-based reflective activities, translanguaging practices, and technology-supported learning. The findings further indicate that AMA-integrated ELT strategies enhanced learners' language accuracy, communicative competence, self-regulation, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The study concludes that AMA functions as a reflective pedagogical framework that connects linguistic knowledge, meaningful communication, and cognitive development. The novelty of this study lies in integrating AMA with communicative, task-based, translanguaging, and technology-enhanced ELT approaches within Indonesian and Thai EFL contexts. The findings provide implications for teachers and curriculum developers seeking to create more reflective, autonomous, and cognitively engaging English learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a crucial means of communication in academic, professional, and international contexts, positioning English language education as an important component of educational development worldwide (Azadian et al. 2026; Lume, Mai, & Marie, 2026). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in Southeast

Asian countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, English learning is often challenged by limited exposure to authentic language environments, diverse learner backgrounds, and differences between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. Although both countries have implemented various reforms to promote communicative competence, many EFL classrooms continue to experience difficulties in transforming learners from passive recipients of linguistic knowledge into active users who can analyze, adapt, and apply English strategically in real communication. These challenges indicate that improving EFL learning requires more than introducing new teaching methods; it requires pedagogical approaches that develop learners' awareness of how language functions and how linguistic knowledge can be consciously applied in different contexts.

One important construct that has received increasing attention in second language education is applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA). Applied metalinguistic awareness refers to learners' ability to consciously reflect on, analyze, and manipulate linguistic forms and functions during language learning and communication. Unlike implicit linguistic knowledge acquired naturally through exposure and interaction, AMA involves explicit understanding of how grammatical structures, vocabulary choices, discourse patterns, and pragmatic features contribute to meaning construction within specific contexts. In EFL environments where learners often have limited opportunities to interact with English outside the classroom, AMA provides an important mechanism for connecting linguistic knowledge with actual language performance. Through activities such as grammatical reflection, error analysis, comparative language analysis, and guided self-correction, learners are encouraged to monitor their own language production, evaluate the effectiveness of their communication, and develop greater autonomy in language learning (Azadian et al., 2026; Ha et al., 2021). Furthermore, AMA extends beyond linguistic accuracy because it engages learners in higher-order cognitive processes, including analysis, evaluation, problem-solving, and reflective thinking. Thus, AMA can be viewed as a bridge between language knowledge and cognitive development, enabling learners to understand not only what language forms are used but also why and how they function in communication.

Previous research has demonstrated that metalinguistic awareness can be developed through explicit instructional practices, particularly through corrective feedback, reflective activities, and learner-centered approaches. Metalinguistic feedback, for example, supports learners in identifying linguistic problems, understanding the underlying rules, and applying corrective strategies independently in future communication tasks (Ha et al., 2021; Pourmohammadi et al., 2021; Reynolds & Zhang, 2022; Singh & Halim, 2023). Research in different EFL contexts has shown that learners and teachers generally value explicit explanations of language forms because they facilitate deeper understanding of the relationship between form and meaning (Pourmohammadi et al., 2021; Rezalou, 2020). However, the effectiveness of metalinguistic practices depends on contextual factors, including learner proficiency, teacher beliefs, instructional goals, and classroom conditions (Alhazmi, 2024; Ha et al., 2021). This suggests that AMA should not be treated as a universal technique applied independently of context but rather as a pedagogical principle integrated with appropriate teaching strategies.

In Indonesia and Thailand, the implementation of English language teaching (ELT) strategies continues to face complex challenges related to pedagogical traditions, assessment systems, teacher readiness, and access to learning resources. In Indonesia, many EFL classrooms remain influenced by teacher-centered approaches that emphasize grammar explanation, vocabulary memorization, and written exercises, often as a consequence of examination-oriented educational practices. Although communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), and technology-enhanced

learning have been promoted, their implementation remains uneven due to differences in teacher competence, institutional support, and classroom contexts (Fu, 2022; Lubis & Samsudin, 2021; Prasetya, 2024). Indonesian studies also indicate that teacher agency and technological competence play significant roles in adopting innovative ELT practices, particularly in online and blended learning environments (Ilahude et al., 2023; Sukarno et al., 2024).

Similarly, Thailand has experienced challenges in implementing communicative-oriented ELT approaches despite national efforts to improve English proficiency. Research indicates that Thai EFL classrooms often encounter limited opportunities for authentic interaction, continued reliance on traditional instructional practices, and difficulties adapting CLT and TBLT approaches to different learner proficiency levels and educational settings (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021; Poonpon et al., 2022). While task-based and genre-based approaches have demonstrated potential for improving learners' communicative competence, successful implementation requires appropriate scaffolding, teacher preparation, and alignment with local classroom realities (Poonpon et al., 2022). These conditions demonstrate that the challenge in EFL education is not merely selecting appropriate teaching strategies but ensuring that such strategies promote meaningful engagement, reflection, and learner autonomy.

Recent ELT developments suggest that communicative and task-based approaches can be strengthened when combined with reflective language awareness practices. CLT and TBLT provide opportunities for learners to use English in authentic situations, but without sufficient reflection on linguistic forms and functions, learners may struggle to develop accuracy, self-monitoring ability, and deeper understanding of language use. Integrating AMA into ELT strategies allows learners to engage in both communicative practice and explicit linguistic analysis. For instance, learners can analyze errors after completing communicative tasks, compare linguistic structures across languages, evaluate feedback, and reflect on their communication choices. Such integration aligns with translanguaging approaches, which encourage learners to use their complete linguistic repertoires to analyze meaning construction and develop cross-linguistic awareness (Alasmari et al., 2022; Cinaglia & Costa, 2022; Tang et al., 2024). Moreover, post-method perspectives emphasize the importance of teacher adaptability and contextualized pedagogy, suggesting that effective ELT should be developed according to local needs rather than relying on a single standardized methodology (Mohsina & Naziba, 2022).

Despite increasing recognition of AMA and innovative ELT approaches, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, previous studies have frequently examined metalinguistic awareness, corrective feedback, translanguaging, or ELT strategies as separate constructs rather than investigating their integrated role in supporting both language development and cognitive growth. Second, limited research has comparatively explored how AMA-informed ELT practices operate within Southeast Asian EFL contexts, particularly Indonesia and Thailand, where similar educational challenges exist but classroom cultures and policy environments differ. Third, although technology-enhanced learning and teacher professional development have received considerable attention, less emphasis has been placed on how digital and communicative learning environments can incorporate metalinguistic reflection to strengthen learner autonomy and higher-order thinking skills.

Therefore, this study introduces a novel perspective by examining the integration of applied metalinguistic awareness with ELT strategies as a comprehensive framework for enhancing EFL learners' linguistic and cognitive competencies in Indonesian and Thai contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to connect three previously separated dimensions: explicit language awareness, contemporary ELT pedagogies, and cognitive

development. Rather than viewing metalinguistic awareness as limited to grammar instruction, this study conceptualizes AMA as a reflective learning mechanism embedded within communicative, task-based, translanguaging, and technology-supported teaching practices.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the role of applied metalinguistic awareness within ELT strategies and explore its implications for improving EFL learners' language skills and cognitive abilities in Indonesia and Thailand. Specifically, the study seeks to identify how AMA is integrated into contemporary ELT practices and examine how such integration contributes to learners' linguistic competence, autonomy, and higher-order thinking development. The research objectives are addressed through the following research questions:

RQ1: *How is applied metalinguistic awareness integrated into English language teaching strategies in Indonesian and Thai EFL contexts?*

RQ2: *How does the integration of applied metalinguistic awareness and ELT strategies contribute to the development of EFL learners' language skills and cognitive abilities?*

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA) is integrated into English language teaching (ELT) practices and how it contributes to EFL learners' linguistic and cognitive development in Indonesian and Thai contexts. A qualitative approach was selected because the objectives of the study focus on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, learning processes, and classroom interactions rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to investigate complex educational phenomena within their natural settings and capture the meanings that learners and teachers construct through classroom activities, language use, and reflective practices.

The suitability of this design is grounded in the nature of the research questions, which seek to understand how AMA is implemented and how it influences learners' language and cognitive development. Since metalinguistic awareness involves learners' conscious reflection, strategic language use, and interpretation of linguistic forms, it cannot be adequately represented only through numerical measurements. Instead, qualitative exploration provides deeper insights into learners' reasoning processes, their responses to instructional strategies, and the ways in which classroom practices encourage reflection, self-monitoring, and autonomous learning. Through interviews and classroom observations, this design allows the researcher to examine the relationship between ELT strategies and learners' engagement with linguistic knowledge in authentic instructional contexts.

The qualitative design also aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of contextual interpretation in examining metalinguistic knowledge, corrective feedback, translanguaging practices, and teacher-mediated language learning processes (Alasmari et al., 2022; Cinaglia & Costa, 2022; Pourmohammadi et al., 2021). In particular, classroom-based qualitative investigation is appropriate for EFL contexts such as Indonesia and Thailand, where teaching practices are influenced by educational policies, teacher beliefs, examination systems, and sociocultural factors.

However, qualitative research may involve several limitations, including researcher subjectivity, limited generalizability, and potential bias in interpreting participants' experiences. Since qualitative findings are constructed through interaction between researchers and participants, the researcher's assumptions and perspectives may influence data interpretation. To address these limitations, several strategies were implemented. First,

methodological triangulation was applied by combining semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to obtain complementary perspectives on participants' experiences and classroom practices. Second, the interview questions and observation protocols were developed based on established theoretical frameworks related to applied metalinguistic awareness, ELT strategies, and reflective language learning. Third, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review interview summaries and confirm the accuracy of their responses. Finally, systematic coding procedures and peer discussions were applied during data analysis to reduce interpretative bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 27 EFL learners from Indonesia and Thailand who were actively involved in English language classes. The participants were selected to represent learners experiencing different EFL instructional environments and to provide insights into how applied metalinguistic awareness emerges through classroom interaction and language learning activities. A purposive sampling technique was employed because participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria included: (1) being enrolled in an English language course or English-related academic program; (2) having experienced classroom activities involving communicative tasks, language reflection, corrective feedback, or explicit discussion of linguistic forms; (3) being willing to participate in interviews and classroom observation activities; and (4) representing the EFL learning contexts of Indonesia and Thailand.

The participants consisted of learners from both countries to enable exploration of similarities and contextual differences in EFL learning experiences. The sample included 14 Indonesian EFL learners and 13 Thai EFL learners, resulting in a total of 27 participants. Participants represented diverse demographic backgrounds in terms of gender, educational level, and previous English learning experiences. The learners were undergraduate students or equivalent-level learners who had received formal English instruction for several years. The use of 27 participants was considered appropriate for qualitative research because the objective was not statistical representation but achieving sufficient depth and richness of information. In qualitative inquiry, smaller purposive samples are often preferred because they allow researchers to explore participants' experiences in detail and identify recurring patterns across cases. Data collection continued until sufficient thematic saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews and observations no longer generated substantially new categories or interpretations.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

Two qualitative instruments were employed in this study: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The combination of these instruments was intended to capture both participants' reported experiences and their actual engagement with ELT practices in classroom settings. The interview protocol was developed based on the conceptual framework of applied metalinguistic awareness and contemporary ELT strategies. The questions focused on four major areas: (1) learners' understanding of linguistic forms and functions; (2) experiences with corrective feedback and language reflection activities; (3) perceptions of communicative, task-based, and technology-supported English learning strategies; and (4) perceived changes in language skills and cognitive processes, including reflection, problem-solving, and self-regulation. The semi-structured format was selected because it provided consistency across participants while allowing flexibility for deeper exploration of individual experiences. Open-ended questions

were used to encourage participants to explain their perspectives, provide examples, and describe learning experiences in their own words.

To ensure content validity, the interview protocol was reviewed by experts in English language education and qualitative research. The questions were aligned with the research objectives and theoretical dimensions of AMA, including explicit language reflection, form-meaning awareness, feedback processing, and learner autonomy. A pilot interview was conducted with several EFL learners outside the main sample to evaluate question clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility. Based on feedback from the pilot stage, several questions were revised to improve wording and reduce ambiguity.

Classroom observation was conducted to examine how ELT strategies facilitated applied metalinguistic awareness during actual learning activities. The observation checklist was developed based on previous literature related to metalinguistic practices, communicative teaching, task-based learning, and reflective language activities. The observation focused on several indicators, including: teachers' use of explicit explanations of language forms and functions; learners' participation in reflection, error analysis, and self-correction activities; opportunities for communicative interaction; use of feedback strategies; and evidence of learner autonomy and cognitive engagement. Non-participant observation was conducted to minimize disruption to classroom activities. Field notes were recorded systematically, including descriptions of classroom interactions, instructional strategies, learner responses, and contextual factors influencing language learning. The validity of the observation instrument was strengthened through expert review and alignment with the research framework. Reliability was enhanced through repeated observations and comparison of observation notes with interview findings to identify consistent patterns across data sources.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three interconnected processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, coding, and organizing relevant information from interview transcripts and observation records. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The researcher then conducted initial coding to identify meaningful segments related to applied metalinguistic awareness and ELT strategies.

The coding process followed both deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical framework, including: explicit language reflection; metalinguistic feedback; form-meaning awareness; translanguaging practices; learner autonomy; and cognitive engagement. Meanwhile, inductive codes were developed from emerging patterns found in participants' responses and classroom observations. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories to identify relationships among themes. After condensation, the coded data were organized into matrices and thematic displays to facilitate interpretation. Data displays included comparison tables between Indonesian and Thai learners, thematic summaries of interview responses, and observation-based descriptions of classroom practices. The displays enabled the researcher to identify similarities and differences between contexts, examine relationships between teaching strategies and learner experiences, and trace how AMA contributed to language development and cognitive engagement.

The final stage involved interpreting the emerging themes and developing conclusions related to the research questions. Conclusions were continuously verified by comparing evidence across interviews and observations, examining consistency between participants' perceptions and classroom practices, and reviewing interpretations against

the theoretical framework. To enhance trustworthiness, four criteria were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation between data sources, transferability through detailed contextual descriptions, dependability through systematic documentation of research procedures, and confirmability through transparent coding and reflexive analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

RQ1: How is applied metalinguistic awareness integrated into English language teaching strategies in Indonesian and Thai EFL contexts?

The findings indicate that applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA) was integrated into ELT practices through five major instructional strategies: explicit language reflection, corrective feedback, task-based language activities, translanguaging practices, and technology-supported learning. The interview and classroom observation data revealed that teachers in both Indonesian and Thai EFL contexts did not treat metalinguistic awareness as an isolated grammar-learning activity. Instead, it was embedded within communicative tasks, writing activities, classroom discussions, and reflective learning processes. This finding suggests that AMA functions as a pedagogical bridge between explicit knowledge of language forms and learners' ability to apply English appropriately in communication.

The first dominant integration pattern was explicit linguistic reflection. Learners reported that teachers frequently encouraged them to analyze grammatical structures, vocabulary choices, and sentence patterns before applying them in speaking and writing activities. Rather than simply providing correct answers, teachers guided learners to understand why certain forms were appropriate in particular contexts. This approach enabled learners to establish stronger connections between linguistic forms and meanings.

The second integration pattern involved metalinguistic corrective feedback. Observation data showed that teachers provided explanations about learners' errors instead of only correcting mistakes. Learners were encouraged to identify the source of errors, compare alternative expressions, and revise their language production. This practice reflects previous findings that explicit feedback can promote self-correction and deeper understanding of linguistic features.

The third pattern was the integration of AMA within task-based language teaching (TBLT). Teachers used communicative tasks such as discussions, presentations, and collaborative writing activities that required learners to reflect on their language choices. Through post-task reflection, learners evaluated their performance and identified linguistic aspects that needed improvement. This finding supports the argument that TBLT can provide meaningful contexts for developing metalinguistic awareness when reflective activities are incorporated. The fourth integration pattern was translanguaging-based reflection. Particularly in multilingual classrooms in Indonesia and Thailand, learners used their first language strategically to compare meanings, clarify concepts, and understand differences between languages. Translanguaging was not used as a replacement for English but as a cognitive resource to enhance understanding of language structures and communication strategies.

The fifth pattern was technology-supported metalinguistic learning. Digital platforms, online discussions, and multimedia resources provided opportunities for learners to review language use, receive feedback, and engage in independent reflection. However, the effectiveness of technology integration depended on teacher competence and institutional support, consistent with previous findings regarding TPACK development among EFL teachers. It was supported by interview activities.

***Excerpt 1 – Indonesian learner**: "Before writing an English paragraph, my teacher asks us to discuss why we choose certain words or sentence structures. It helps me understand the function of the language, not only memorize the rules."*
***Excerpt 2 – Thai learner**: "When the teacher corrects our mistakes, she explains the reason behind the correction. After that, I can recognize similar mistakes when I write another assignment."*
***Excerpt 3 – Indonesian learner**: "Sometimes we compare English expressions with Indonesian expressions because some meanings cannot be translated directly. This comparison helps me understand how English works."*
***Excerpt 4 – Thai learner**: "Using online activities allows me to review my mistakes and improve my sentences before submitting assignments."*

Table 1. Integration Patterns of Applied Metalinguistic Awareness within English Language Teaching Strategies in Indonesian and Thai EFL Contexts

Emerging Theme	Description of Integration	Evidence from Observation and Interview	Context Representation
Explicit language reflection	Teachers encouraged learners to analyze grammar, vocabulary, and discourse functions	Learners reflected on why specific expressions were appropriate	Indonesia and Thailand
Metalinguistic corrective feedback	Feedback included explanations of errors and strategies for revision	Learners reported increased awareness of recurring language problems	Indonesia and Thailand
Task-based reflective activities	AMA was embedded in communicative tasks and post-task evaluation	Learners analyzed language use after completing speaking/writing tasks	Indonesia and Thailand
Translanguaging practices	Learners used L1 strategically to compare linguistic meanings	Cross-language comparison supported deeper understanding	Multilingual classrooms
Technology-supported reflection	Digital tools facilitated feedback, revision, and independent learning	Learners accessed additional language resources outside classroom hours	Mainly technology-supported classes

Table 1 illustrates that applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA) was integrated into English language teaching through multiple complementary strategies rather than being implemented as an isolated instructional component. The findings indicate that explicit language reflection represented the most fundamental form of AMA integration, as teachers encouraged learners to examine grammatical structures, vocabulary selection, and discourse functions before applying them in communicative contexts. This practice enabled learners to move beyond mechanical language learning toward conscious understanding of how linguistic forms convey meaning. The integration of metalinguistic corrective feedback further strengthened this process by transforming feedback from simple error correction into a reflective learning opportunity. Instead of merely identifying incorrect responses, teachers provided explanations about the causes of errors and guided learners to develop strategies for self-correction. This finding demonstrates that feedback functions not only as an assessment mechanism but also as a cognitive tool that promotes learners' awareness of language patterns and improves their ability to regulate language use.

Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that AMA was effectively embedded within broader contemporary ELT approaches, particularly task-based language teaching, translanguaging, and technology-supported learning. Task-based activities provided authentic contexts where learners were required to use English meaningfully while reflecting on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their language choices. Meanwhile, translanguaging practices enabled learners in Indonesian and Thai multilingual contexts to utilize their existing linguistic resources to compare meanings, identify differences between languages, and develop deeper cross-linguistic awareness. The use of technology-supported activities expanded opportunities for learners to receive feedback, revise their language production, and engage in independent reflection beyond classroom boundaries. Collectively, these findings suggest that AMA integration is most effective when combined with communicative, reflective, and learner-centered ELT strategies. Rather than replacing established teaching approaches, AMA enriches them by adding a reflective dimension that connects linguistic knowledge, practical communication, and learner autonomy.

RQ2: How does the integration of applied metalinguistic awareness and ELT strategies contribute to the development of EFL learners' language skills and cognitive abilities?

The findings demonstrate that the integration of AMA and ELT strategies contributed to improvements in both language-related competencies and higher-order cognitive abilities. Based on interview responses and classroom observations, learners perceived that reflective language activities helped them become more accurate, confident, and independent English users. Furthermore, AMA-based ELT practices encouraged learners to analyze problems, evaluate alternatives, and make conscious decisions regarding language use.

Regarding language development, participants identified improvements in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary selection, writing organization, and oral communication. Learners explained that understanding the relationship between linguistic forms and communicative purposes helped them produce more meaningful English rather than simply constructing grammatically correct sentences. This finding indicates that AMA supports not only linguistic accuracy but also functional language competence. The integration of AMA also strengthened learner autonomy and self-regulation. Learners reported becoming more capable of identifying their own weaknesses, monitoring their progress, and applying correction strategies independently. Instead of depending entirely on teachers, learners developed strategies to evaluate and improve their own language performance.

In terms of cognitive development, the findings showed that AMA encouraged analytical thinking, reflection, and problem-solving abilities. Through activities such as error analysis and language comparison, learners engaged in cognitive processes requiring interpretation, evaluation, and decision-making. These findings support previous research suggesting that metalinguistic awareness contributes to broader cognitive development because learners actively examine how language systems operate (Alasmari et al., 2022; Cinaglia & Costa, 2022). Moreover, the combination of AMA with communicative and task-based strategies created opportunities for deeper learning. Learners were not only required to produce English but also to explain their choices, justify their responses, and reflect on communication effectiveness. Therefore, AMA transformed ELT activities from simple language practice into reflective learning experiences.

The summary of interview activities showed that findings based on the learners' perseption.

***Excerpt 1 – Indonesian learner**: "After learning through reflection activities, I do not only check whether my sentence is correct, but I also think about whether it expresses the intended meaning."*

***Excerpt 2 – Thai learner**: "The activities make me think more deeply because I have to explain why I use certain grammar or vocabulary."*

***Excerpt 3 – Indonesian learner**: "Previously, I waited for the teacher to correct my writing. Now I try to find my mistakes and revise them myself."*

***Excerpt 4 – Thai learner**: "Group discussions and feedback activities help me solve problems when I cannot express my ideas in English."*

Table 2. Contribution of Applied Metalinguistic Awareness and ELT Strategies to EFL Learners' Language and Cognitive Development

Development Dimension	Contribution of AMA-Integrated ELT	Evidence from Participants
Language accuracy	Improved understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction	Learners reported fewer repeated errors
Communicative competence	Increased confidence in speaking and writing activities	Learners became more aware of appropriate language choices
Self-regulation	Enhanced ability to monitor and revise language production	Learners independently evaluated their work
Critical thinking	Encouraged analysis and evaluation of language problems	Learners explained reasons behind linguistic choices
Problem-solving skills	Developed strategies to overcome communication difficulties	Learners explored alternative expressions and solutions

Table 2 indicates that the integration of AMA and ELT strategies contributed significantly to the development of learners' language competencies, particularly in terms of language accuracy, communicative competence, and self-regulation. The findings suggest that learners developed a deeper understanding of grammatical structures, vocabulary use, and sentence construction because they were actively involved in analyzing linguistic forms and their communicative purposes. Rather than memorizing grammatical rules, learners became more capable of evaluating whether particular expressions were appropriate within specific contexts. This process contributed to improved writing quality, more accurate oral production, and greater confidence in using English. In addition, AMA-supported activities encouraged learners to become more independent language users by developing self-monitoring strategies. Learners reported that they gradually became able to identify their own linguistic weaknesses, revise their mistakes, and make informed decisions about language choices without relying entirely on teacher correction.

Beyond linguistic development, Table 2 reveals that AMA-integrated ELT strategies also enhanced learners' higher-order cognitive abilities, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Through reflective activities such as error analysis, language comparison, and feedback interpretation, learners were required to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and justify their linguistic decisions. These cognitive processes indicate that language learning became an intellectual activity involving reasoning and decision-making rather than merely the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. The integration of AMA with communicative and task-based approaches created opportunities for learners to solve communication problems, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their learning progress. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that AMA serves a dual function: supporting the development of English proficiency while simultaneously strengthening cognitive capacities essential for autonomous and lifelong

learning. This reinforces the argument that effective EFL instruction should integrate linguistic awareness and cognitive engagement within meaningful learning experiences.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that applied metalinguistic awareness (AMA) functions as an important pedagogical mechanism for connecting explicit language knowledge with meaningful communication in EFL classrooms. The results revealed that AMA was integrated through explicit language reflection, corrective feedback, task-based activities, translanguaging practices, and technology-supported learning. This finding confirms previous research emphasizing that metalinguistic awareness enables learners to consciously analyze linguistic forms, understand their communicative functions, and regulate their language use (Ha et al., 2021; Pourmohammadi et al., 2021). Rather than positioning grammar awareness as a traditional form-focused activity, the present study extends existing understanding by showing that AMA can operate as a reflective framework embedded within communicative and learner-centered ELT practices. The learners in this study reported that teachers encouraged them to analyze grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures before applying them in speaking and writing tasks, indicating that metalinguistic reflection supported deeper connections between form and meaning. This finding is consistent with Aydın (2023), who found that explicit L2 knowledge contributes to learners' written proficiency by allowing them to consciously apply linguistic rules in productive language activities.

The finding regarding the importance of metalinguistic corrective feedback supports previous studies highlighting feedback as a cognitive process rather than merely an error correction mechanism. In this study, learners indicated that teacher explanations regarding the causes of errors helped them identify recurring language problems and develop self-correction strategies. This result aligns with Ha et al. (2021), who reported that oral corrective feedback contributes to learners' understanding of linguistic forms when explanations are provided within meaningful classroom interactions. Similarly, Reynolds and Zhang (2022) emphasized that learners benefit from feedback practices that explain why particular language choices are inappropriate and how they can be improved. The current study extends these findings by demonstrating that corrective feedback becomes more effective when incorporated into broader AMA-oriented practices, where learners are encouraged to analyze, compare, and revise their own language production. Therefore, the role of feedback is not limited to improving accuracy but also includes developing learners' metacognitive control over language learning.

The integration of AMA within task-based language teaching (TBLT) represents another significant contribution of this study. Previous research has demonstrated that TBLT provides authentic opportunities for learners to develop communicative competence through meaningful tasks (Fu, 2022; Marzuki, 2022). However, some studies have noted that TBLT implementation in Asian EFL contexts remains challenging because teachers often adapt tasks to accommodate examination systems, learner proficiency levels, and classroom constraints (Liu & Ren, 2021; Poonpon et al., 2022). The present findings extend this discussion by showing that reflective stages within task cycles can strengthen the effectiveness of TBLT. Learners were not only required to complete communicative tasks but also encouraged to evaluate their linguistic choices after completing activities. This reflective dimension transforms TBLT from a primarily communicative approach into a deeper learning process involving analysis, evaluation, and self-regulation. Consequently, the findings suggest that integrating AMA can address one limitation of conventional TBLT implementation, namely the potential separation between communicative fluency and linguistic awareness.

The findings regarding translanguaging practices also contribute to current discussions on multilingual approaches in EFL education. In this study, Indonesian and Thai learners used their first languages strategically to compare meanings, clarify concepts, and understand differences between linguistic systems. This finding supports Alasmari et al. (2022), Cinaglia and Costa (2022), and Tang et al. (2024), who argue that translanguaging can enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness by allowing them to utilize their complete linguistic repertoires. However, unlike traditional views that consider first-language use as interference in foreign language learning, the present study indicates that strategic use of learners' existing languages can facilitate deeper understanding of English structures and communication patterns. This finding is particularly relevant in Southeast Asian EFL contexts, where learners commonly operate within multilingual environments. Nevertheless, effective translanguaging requires teacher competence and appropriate instructional design because uncontrolled use of multiple languages may reduce opportunities for English practice. Therefore, the findings support a balanced perspective in which translanguaging serves as a cognitive resource rather than a replacement for English exposure.

Another important contribution of this study concerns the role of technology-supported learning in facilitating AMA development. Previous research has emphasized the importance of technological competence and TPACK development among EFL teachers in implementing digital learning strategies (Ilahude et al., 2023; Sukarno et al., 2024). The present study confirms that digital platforms provide additional opportunities for learners to review feedback, revise language production, and engage in independent reflection. However, the findings also indicate that technology alone does not guarantee improved learning outcomes. Instead, meaningful integration depends on teachers' ability to design reflective activities and provide pedagogical guidance. This supports previous arguments that technology should be considered a tool for enhancing pedagogy rather than a substitute for effective instructional strategies (Purwati et al., 2024).

Regarding learner development, the findings demonstrate that AMA-integrated ELT strategies contributed not only to language skills but also to cognitive abilities. Learners reported improvements in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary selection, writing organization, communication confidence, self-regulation, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These findings support earlier theoretical perspectives suggesting that metalinguistic awareness involves higher-order cognitive processes because learners must analyze language structures, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions regarding appropriate language use (Alasmari et al., 2022; Cinaglia & Costa, 2022). The present study extends previous research by demonstrating that cognitive development occurs naturally when learners participate in reflective language activities. In other words, language learning becomes a process of reasoning and problem-solving rather than simply memorizing linguistic information.

The study also contributes a contextual perspective by comparing Indonesian and Thai EFL environments. Although both contexts share similar challenges, including limited authentic English exposure, examination-oriented practices, and uneven implementation of communicative approaches, the findings indicate that AMA provides a flexible framework adaptable to different educational settings. Previous research has primarily examined metalinguistic awareness, corrective feedback, or ELT strategies separately. In contrast, this study integrates these dimensions into a comprehensive framework that connects language awareness, pedagogy, and cognitive development. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing AMA as an embedded reflective mechanism within contemporary ELT strategies rather than as an independent linguistic competence. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The

qualitative design and purposive sample of 27 learners provide rich contextual insights but limit statistical generalization.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that applied metalinguistic awareness represents an essential dimension of effective English language teaching in EFL contexts. The findings demonstrate that AMA is not limited to explicit grammar instruction but can be integrated into broader ELT strategies through reflective language activities, corrective feedback, task-based learning, translanguaging, and technology-supported practices. The qualitative evidence from Indonesian and Thai EFL learners indicates that AMA enables learners to establish stronger relationships between linguistic forms and communicative meanings. Through continuous reflection, analysis, and self-correction, learners become more capable of monitoring their language production and developing greater autonomy. Therefore, AMA should be considered a complementary pedagogical framework that strengthens existing communicative and learner-centered approaches rather than replacing them.

Furthermore, the integration of AMA with ELT strategies contributes to both linguistic development and cognitive growth. The findings indicate that learners improved their language accuracy, communicative competence, and confidence while simultaneously developing self-regulation, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The novelty of this study lies in presenting AMA as an integrated reflective mechanism that connects explicit language awareness, contemporary ELT strategies, and higher-order cognitive development within Southeast Asian EFL contexts. The study suggests that EFL teachers should incorporate structured reflection, meaningful feedback, and contextualized language analysis into classroom practices to promote deeper learning. Although further research involving larger populations and longitudinal approaches is required, this study provides theoretical and practical implications for designing more reflective, autonomous, and cognitively engaging EFL learning environments.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used as supportive instruments during the preparation of this manuscript, particularly for language refinement, organization of academic writing, and improvement of manuscript clarity. The authors remain fully responsible for the research design, data interpretation, academic arguments, and final content presented in this article.

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