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The Efficacy of Metalinguistic Awareness and English Language Teaching Quality on Learners' Reading Skill Development

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ABSTRACT

Metalinguistic awareness has been recognized as an important cognitive-linguistic capacity that enables learners to consciously analyze and manipulate language structures during foreign language learning. However, limited studies have examined how metalinguistic awareness interacts with English language teaching quality within multilingual EFL contexts. This study aimed to investigate how metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality contribute to learners' English reading development. A qualitative research design was employed involving 29 EFL learners from Indonesia and Morocco. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using thematic analysis involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings revealed that metalinguistic awareness supported reading development by enabling learners to analyze vocabulary, recognize morphological patterns, interpret sentence structures, and construct meaning from texts. English language teaching quality strengthened this process through explicit explanation, cognitive questioning, feedback, and opportunities for linguistic reflection. Comparative findings showed that Indonesian learners relied mainly on Indonesian and local languages, while Moroccan learners utilized Arabic, Amazigh, and French as linguistic resources for English learning. The study concludes that reading development in EFL contexts is shaped by the interaction between learners' internal linguistic awareness, instructional quality, and multilingual environments. The findings imply that EFL instruction should integrate metalinguistic activities with context-sensitive pedagogical practices to promote deeper language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Metalinguistic awareness has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental cognitive-linguistic capacity that influences successful second and foreign language learning (Akbulut, 2022; Atouf, 2023). Unlike ordinary language use, which involves the ability to communicate through linguistic forms, metalinguistic awareness refers to

learners' conscious ability to reflect on, analyze, and manipulate the structural and functional properties of language (Baytar & Cakir, 2022; Bloushi & Al-Bloushi, 2023). This awareness includes sensitivity toward phonological, morphological, syntactic, orthographic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of language, allowing learners to understand how linguistic forms convey meaning and how those forms can be modified according to communicative purposes (Chan, 2020; Donoso, 2022). Such capability is particularly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners often experience limited exposure to authentic English input and rely heavily on classroom instruction to develop their understanding of vocabulary, sentence structures, word formation, and discourse patterns.

In EFL learning environments, language achievement is not determined solely by the amount of vocabulary acquired or grammatical rules memorized, but also by learners' ability to consciously process linguistic information (Cho, 2020; Cho & McBride, 2020; Febrianto, 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated that different dimensions of metalinguistic awareness contribute to language development, particularly in reading-related processes (Haase & Steinbrink, 2022; Haque & Sharmin, 2022; Hidayatun et al., 2021). Phonological awareness supports decoding accuracy, morphological awareness assists learners in identifying relationships among words and inferring meanings, while orthographic and syntactic awareness contribute to more efficient interpretation of written texts. Research synthesis across languages has consistently shown that metalinguistic awareness is associated with word recognition, spelling, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Lee et al., 2022; Gottardo et al., 2021; Levesque et al., 2020; Ruan et al., 2022). These findings indicate that metalinguistic awareness functions not only as a supporting linguistic skill but also as an important mechanism that enables learners to regulate and strategically apply their language knowledge.

Despite this evidence, English instruction in many EFL classrooms continues to emphasize the transmission of grammatical rules, vocabulary memorization, and completion of structured exercises (Haerazi, 2023; Irfan et al., 2023; Justi et al., 2023). Such approaches may help students acquire declarative knowledge about language, yet they do not necessarily develop learners' ability to analyze and apply linguistic knowledge independently in authentic contexts. Students may know grammatical concepts but struggle to recognize patterns in unfamiliar words, interpret complex sentences, monitor linguistic accuracy, or connect linguistic structures with meaning. This gap between knowing language rules and consciously controlling language use represents a significant challenge in foreign language education because successful communication requires learners to actively analyze and manipulate linguistic resources rather than merely reproduce previously learned forms.

Among the components of metalinguistic awareness, morphological awareness has received substantial attention because of its strong relationship with vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Morphological awareness enables learners to recognize meaningful units within words, understand affixation processes, and infer meanings from morphological structures (Krimpogianni, 2020; Kurniawan, 2020). A large-scale meta-synthesis involving thousands of effect sizes across multiple languages reported moderate relationships between morphological awareness and word reading, spelling, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Lee et al., 2022; Ke & Liu, 2026; Khair, 2022). These relationships suggest that learners who possess stronger morphological awareness are better equipped to decode unfamiliar words and construct meaning from texts. Furthermore, morphological awareness contributes to reading comprehension through both direct and indirect pathways, including support for

vocabulary growth, decoding efficiency, and fluent reading processes (Lee et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2022; Levesque et al., 2020).

The contribution of metalinguistic awareness to English learning is also influenced by cross-linguistic factors, including differences between learners' first language (L1) and English as a second or foreign language (L2). Research on bilingual and multilingual learners indicates that linguistic knowledge developed in the first language can support second-language processing, although the degree of transfer depends on language distance, orthographic characteristics, exposure, and instructional conditions. Phonological awareness often demonstrates stronger cross-language transfer, whereas morphological and orthographic transfer may require greater alignment between languages and explicit instructional support (Gottardo et al., 2021; Li & Koda, 2025). Therefore, metalinguistic awareness cannot be understood as a universal skill operating independently from context; rather, its influence is shaped by learners' linguistic backgrounds and the learning environment in which English is acquired.

The importance of metalinguistic awareness becomes more complex in multilingual EFL settings such as Indonesia and Morocco. In these contexts, students navigate multiple linguistic systems, and their existing linguistic resources may either support or constrain English learning depending on how instruction utilizes them. Indonesian learners commonly operate within multilingual environments involving local languages, Indonesian, and English, while Moroccan learners encounter interactions among Arabic, Amazigh, French, and English. These multilingual conditions create opportunities for translanguaging practices, in which learners strategically use their complete linguistic repertoire to understand relationships between languages and construct meaning. Previous research suggests that translanguaging can facilitate metalinguistic reflection by encouraging learners to compare linguistic forms, recognize similarities and differences across languages, and develop greater awareness of form–meaning relationships (Madkur et al., 2022; Muqarshi & Kaparou, 2023; R'boul & Belhiah, 2023).

However, the development of metalinguistic awareness is not determined only by learners' internal cognitive resources. The quality of English language teaching plays a critical role in providing instructional conditions that activate, scaffold, and transform metalinguistic knowledge into practical language performance. Teaching quality encompasses instructional clarity, cognitive activation, feedback mechanisms, scaffolding strategies, differentiated learning opportunities, and classroom interactions that encourage learners to analyze language rather than simply memorize information. High-quality instruction provides opportunities for learners to apply metalinguistic strategies during reading, writing, speaking, and interpretation of meaning. Conversely, instructional practices dominated by teacher explanation and low-level exercises may limit opportunities for learners to engage in deeper linguistic analysis (Baytar & Çakır, 2022; Koç, 2022; Rasool et al., 2024).

Reading development represents one of the most relevant domains for examining the interaction between metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality. Reading in a foreign language requires learners to coordinate multiple processes, including word recognition, vocabulary access, syntactic interpretation, inferential reasoning, and comprehension monitoring. Learners with strong metalinguistic awareness are more capable of identifying word structures, resolving linguistic ambiguity, and constructing meaning from complex texts. Nevertheless, these abilities may not fully develop without appropriate classroom support. Studies in Indonesia indicate that English learning implementation is influenced by teacher competence, instructional resources, curriculum interpretation, and students' prior exposure to English. Similarly, Moroccan EFL classrooms demonstrate challenges related to multilingual realities, language policy, and differences between competency-

based curriculum goals and classroom implementation (Ahmad, 2023; Daoud & Kasztalska, 2022; Febrianto, 2021; R'boul & Belhiah, 2023).

Although previous studies have extensively examined metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality separately, limited research has investigated how these two factors operate together as integrated predictors of English reading development, particularly through comparative analysis of multilingual EFL contexts. Existing evidence confirms that metalinguistic awareness provides learners with cognitive resources for analyzing language, while teaching quality determines whether these resources are effectively activated and transferred into meaningful learning outcomes. However, the interaction between learner-level linguistic awareness and classroom-level instructional quality remains insufficiently explored. Understanding this relationship is important because improvements in English education require attention not only to what learners possess cognitively but also to how educational environments facilitate the use of those capabilities.

The novelty of this study lies in developing an integrated analytical model that examines metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality simultaneously as predictors of middle-school students' English reading development in Indonesia and Morocco. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on individual linguistic components or isolated instructional variables, this study positions metalinguistic awareness as an internal cognitive resource and teaching quality as an external pedagogical mechanism that jointly influence reading outcomes. Furthermore, the comparative multilingual perspective provides new insight into how linguistic ecology, translanguaging opportunities, instructional practices, and contextual differences shape the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and reading achievement.

Based on this rationale, the study aims to investigate the contribution of metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality to middle-school students' English reading development and to examine whether these relationships differ across Indonesian and Moroccan EFL contexts. The study seeks to answer two research questions:

How do metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality individually and collectively predict students' English reading development in middle-school EFL contexts?

How do contextual differences between Indonesia and Morocco influence the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, teaching quality, and English reading performance?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how metalinguistic awareness and English language learning experiences are developed among EFL learners in Indonesia and Morocco. A qualitative approach was selected because the objectives of the study focus on understanding learners' perceptions, experiences, cognitive processes, and classroom interactions related to English learning rather than measuring relationships among variables statistically. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to investigate how learners interpret linguistic forms, recognize patterns in English, utilize previous language knowledge, and experience instructional practices within their specific educational and sociolinguistic contexts.

The selection of a qualitative design was appropriate for addressing the research objectives because metalinguistic awareness represents a complex cognitive-linguistic phenomenon that involves learners' conscious reflection on language structures, meanings, and usage. Such processes cannot be fully captured through quantitative scores alone. Through interviews and classroom observations, this study was able to examine how learners describe their strategies for understanding vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation,

and reading comprehension, as well as how classroom environments facilitate or constrain their development of metalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, the comparative nature of the study involving Indonesian and Moroccan EFL contexts required an approach capable of capturing contextual differences related to multilingual backgrounds, classroom practices, and learners' language experiences.

The qualitative design also allowed the study to explore the interaction between learner-related factors and instructional conditions. Learners' metalinguistic awareness is influenced not only by individual cognitive abilities but also by classroom interaction, teacher support, feedback practices, and opportunities to analyze language forms. Classroom observations provided contextual evidence regarding how English lessons were conducted, how teachers encouraged linguistic reflection, and how learners engaged with English tasks. Therefore, combining interviews and observations enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between learners' internal linguistic awareness and external instructional environments.

Nevertheless, qualitative research has several potential limitations, including limited generalizability due to relatively small sample sizes, researcher interpretation bias, and the possibility that participants may provide socially desirable responses during interviews. To minimize these limitations, several strategies were implemented. Data were collected from participants representing two different EFL contexts, Indonesia and Morocco, to increase contextual diversity. Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with classroom observation findings, allowing the researcher to verify whether reported experiences were consistent with observed practices. In addition, systematic coding procedures, repeated examination of emerging themes, and careful documentation of analytical decisions were employed to enhance credibility and dependability of the findings.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 29 EFL learners from Indonesia and Morocco who were actively involved in English language classes at the secondary education level. The participants were selected because they represented learners who experienced English as a foreign language within formal educational settings and therefore provided relevant insights into the development of metalinguistic awareness in multilingual learning environments. The participant selection followed a purposive sampling strategy, in which individuals were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled in English language courses, have experienced regular classroom-based English instruction, and demonstrate willingness to participate in interviews and classroom observation activities. This sampling approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain rich descriptions of learners' experiences rather than achieve statistical representation of the broader EFL population.

The participants represented two national contexts: Indonesian EFL learners and Moroccan EFL learners. The Indonesian participants were learners who studied English within Indonesia's multilingual educational environment, where students commonly interact with Indonesian, regional languages, and English. The Moroccan participants represented learners within a multilingual context involving Arabic, Amazigh, French, and English. These linguistic backgrounds provided valuable perspectives for examining how different language systems influence learners' awareness of English structures and their strategies for language learning.

The participants varied in terms of gender, learning experience, and educational background. Such diversity was considered important because metalinguistic awareness

may develop differently depending on learners' exposure to English, previous language experiences, and classroom interaction patterns. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the research process. Ethical principles related to informed consent and participant privacy were maintained throughout the study.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

The study employed two qualitative instruments: structured interviews and classroom observations. These instruments were selected because they enabled the researcher to investigate both learners' subjective experiences and actual classroom practices related to metalinguistic awareness development. The interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical dimensions of metalinguistic awareness, including phonological awareness, morphological awareness, syntactic awareness, semantic awareness, and learners' strategies for interpreting English texts. Interview questions were designed to explore learners' perceptions of how they understand unfamiliar vocabulary, analyze sentence structures, compare English with their first language, monitor errors, and use language learning strategies. Additional questions focused on learners' experiences with classroom activities, teacher feedback, and instructional practices that support reflection on language use.

The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to encourage participants to provide detailed explanations of their experiences. The semi-structured format allowed consistency across participants while also providing flexibility for exploring unexpected themes emerging during conversations. The interview guide was reviewed by experts in English language education and qualitative research to ensure alignment between questions, theoretical constructs, and research objectives. Revisions were made based on expert feedback regarding clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

Classroom observation was used as a complementary instrument to examine how metalinguistic awareness was reflected in actual English learning activities. The observation framework focused on instructional practices, teacher explanations, classroom interaction patterns, opportunities for linguistic analysis, feedback strategies, and learner engagement with English forms and meanings. Observations were conducted using structured observation notes to document classroom events, participant interactions, and contextual factors influencing language learning. The validity and reliability of qualitative instruments were ensured through several procedures. Content validity was strengthened by grounding the instruments in previous research on metalinguistic awareness, EFL learning, and language teaching quality. Triangulation between interview and observation data was used to strengthen credibility by comparing participants' reported experiences with classroom realities.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis followed an interactive process involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This analytical framework was adopted to organize, interpret, and develop meaningful patterns from interview transcripts and observation records. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the collected qualitative information. Interview recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to identify meaningful statements related to metalinguistic awareness, language learning strategies, classroom experiences, and instructional support. Initial coding was conducted by identifying relevant segments of data, followed by categorization into broader conceptual themes. Codes related to learners' awareness of language structures, vocabulary analysis

strategies, cross-language comparisons, error monitoring, and classroom interaction were developed based on both theoretical concepts and emerging findings from the data.

After initial coding, related codes were grouped into thematic categories. Themes were developed to represent patterns across participants and contexts, including learners' cognitive engagement with English forms, the role of multilingual experiences, instructional practices supporting language reflection, and challenges faced in developing metalinguistic awareness. Comparative analysis was conducted between Indonesian and Moroccan participants to identify similarities and contextual variations in learners' experiences. Data display was conducted through organized matrices, thematic summaries, and comparative descriptions. These displays allowed the researcher to examine relationships among categories and identify connections between learners' metalinguistic awareness and classroom instructional practices. Interview findings were compared with observation evidence to determine consistency between learners' perceptions and observed learning processes.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying interpretations. Conclusions were developed by examining recurring patterns, relationships among themes, and contextual explanations emerging from the data. The researcher continuously compared interpretations with the original transcripts and observation notes to ensure that conclusions were grounded in participants' experiences. Member checking was also considered to enhance credibility by allowing participants to confirm whether interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. Through this systematic qualitative analysis process, the study generated an in-depth understanding of how EFL learners in Indonesia and Morocco develop metalinguistic awareness, how classroom practices influence this development, and how multilingual contexts shape learners' approaches to English learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

How do metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality individually and collectively predict students' English reading development in middle-school EFL contexts?

The qualitative findings indicate that metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality function as interconnected factors that support students' English reading development. Although the qualitative design does not aim to establish statistical prediction, the interview and observation data reveal patterns showing that learners with stronger awareness of linguistic structures tend to demonstrate more strategic approaches to reading, particularly in interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary, identifying grammatical relationships, and constructing meaning from texts. At the same time, teaching quality determines the extent to which students are encouraged to activate and develop such awareness through classroom interaction, explicit explanation, feedback, and analytical reading activities.

Participants frequently described metalinguistic awareness as a process of consciously examining language rather than simply memorizing vocabulary or grammatical rules. Indonesian and Moroccan learners reported that their ability to analyze word structures, compare linguistic forms, and infer meanings helped them understand English texts more effectively. For example, one Indonesian learner stated, *"When I do not know a word, I try to look at the prefix or the ending because sometimes it gives a clue about the meaning."* Another participant explained, *"I do not only remember the grammar rule; I try to understand why the sentence is formed in that way."* Similarly, a Moroccan learner mentioned, *"Arabic and French sometimes help me understand English words because I compare the structure*

and meaning between languages." These statements indicate that learners' conscious reflection on linguistic forms supports reading comprehension processes.

The findings also show that morphological and syntactic awareness were particularly important dimensions of metalinguistic awareness in reading development. Learners who reported analyzing word formation, affixes, sentence patterns, and contextual meaning demonstrated greater confidence when encountering unfamiliar reading materials. Classroom observations supported these perceptions by showing that students became more engaged when teachers encouraged them to break down words, identify grammatical patterns, and discuss alternative meanings. One participant reflected, *"The teacher usually asks us why the writer uses this word, not only what the word means."* This practice encouraged students to move beyond surface-level understanding toward deeper linguistic analysis.

English language teaching quality emerged as an external factor that strengthened learners' use of metalinguistic awareness. Participants emphasized that teachers who provided explanations, examples, questioning strategies, and corrective feedback helped them become more aware of how English works. Students reported that classroom activities involving discussion, text analysis, and explanation of language patterns were more helpful than activities based only on translation or memorization. A learner from Morocco explained, *"When the teacher explains the relationship between words, I can understand the text better."* Another Indonesian participant stated, *"The teacher's questions make us think about the reason behind the answer, not only choose the correct answer."* These findings demonstrate that teaching quality provides the instructional conditions necessary for learners to apply their metalinguistic resources during reading.

The interaction between metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality was evident throughout the data. Students with existing awareness of language structures benefited more when teachers provided opportunities for analysis and reflection, while students with limited awareness developed greater understanding when teachers explicitly modeled linguistic thinking processes. Observation data showed that classrooms emphasizing cognitive activation, dialogic questioning, and feedback created stronger opportunities for students to practice metalinguistic reasoning. The findings can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Learners' Perceptions of the Contribution of Metalinguistic Awareness and English Language Teaching Quality to Reading Development

Research Focus	Interview Questions	Emerging Themes	Supporting Evidence from Participants
Metalinguistic awareness in reading development	How do you use your knowledge of word structures when reading English texts?	Morphological analysis supports vocabulary interpretation	Learners reported using prefixes, suffixes, and word families to infer meanings
Metalinguistic awareness in reading development	How do you understand difficult English sentences?	Syntactic awareness supports sentence comprehension	Students analyzed sentence structures and grammatical relationships
Metalinguistic awareness in reading development	How do your previous languages help you understand English?	Cross-linguistic comparison facilitates meaning construction	Learners compared English with Indonesian, Arabic, French, or local languages
Teaching quality and reading development	What teacher activities help you understand English texts?	Explicit instruction and guided analysis improve comprehension	Students valued explanation, questioning, and text discussion
Teaching quality	How does teacher	Feedback promotes	Learners became aware

and reading development	feedback influence your English learning?	reflection and self-correction	of linguistic errors and improvement strategies
Interaction between MA and teaching quality	How do classroom activities influence your ability to analyze English?	Supportive classrooms activate metalinguistic awareness	Students developed stronger strategies through analytical tasks

The findings presented in Table 1 demonstrate that metalinguistic awareness plays an important role in supporting students' English reading development by enabling learners to actively analyze linguistic structures rather than relying solely on memorization. The responses indicate that learners who consciously examine word formation, sentence patterns, and contextual meanings develop more effective strategies for understanding English texts. The ability to identify prefixes, suffixes, word families, and grammatical relationships allows learners to infer meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary and interpret complex sentences. These findings suggest that metalinguistic awareness functions as an internal cognitive resource that facilitates deeper reading processes, including decoding, meaning construction, and comprehension monitoring. This interpretation is consistent with previous research indicating that morphological, phonological, and syntactic awareness contribute significantly to vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension because learners can use linguistic knowledge strategically when encountering unfamiliar texts.

Furthermore, Table 1 highlights that English language teaching quality determines how effectively learners activate and develop their metalinguistic awareness during classroom activities. The findings show that students perceived explicit teacher explanations, analytical questioning, meaningful feedback, and text-based discussions as important practices that encouraged them to think about how English works. Rather than simply providing correct answers, effective teachers guided learners to understand the relationship between linguistic forms and meanings, thereby promoting higher levels of cognitive engagement. The interaction between learners' metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality suggests that language development occurs through the combination of individual cognitive resources and supportive instructional environments. In other words, students may possess potential awareness of language structures, but high-quality teaching provides the necessary scaffolding for transforming that awareness into practical reading strategies. These findings reinforce the view that effective EFL instruction should integrate explicit language analysis with communicative and comprehension-oriented activities.

How do contextual differences between Indonesia and Morocco influence the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, teaching quality, and English reading performance?

The findings reveal that contextual differences between Indonesia and Morocco influence how metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality interact to support English reading development. Although learners in both countries demonstrated similar processes of analyzing language forms and using previous linguistic knowledge, the ways in which they developed and applied metalinguistic awareness were shaped by different multilingual environments, educational traditions, and classroom practices. In the Indonesian context, learners frequently described using Indonesian and regional languages as resources for understanding English vocabulary and sentence structures. The multilingual environment encouraged students to compare English expressions with familiar languages, particularly when interpreting unfamiliar words or concepts. One Indonesian participant stated, *"Sometimes I translate the English word into Indonesian first, then*

I understand the meaning from the context." Another explained, *"My local language and Indonesian help me think about different meanings before I choose the English meaning."* These responses indicate that Indonesian learners often employed translanguaging strategies to bridge linguistic knowledge across languages.

Classroom observations in Indonesia showed that teachers commonly supported comprehension through explanation, translation, vocabulary discussion, and contextual examples. However, participants also indicated that some learning activities remained focused on textbook exercises and grammatical accuracy. A learner commented, *"Sometimes we only answer questions from the book, but when the teacher explains the reason, it is easier to understand."* This suggests that Indonesian learners benefited from instructional practices that moved beyond form recognition toward deeper linguistic reflection.

In the Moroccan context, participants described a more complex multilingual environment involving Arabic, Amazigh, French, and English. These languages influenced how learners interpreted English texts and developed awareness of linguistic similarities and differences. A Moroccan learner explained, *"French helps me because some English words are similar, but sometimes Arabic helps me understand the idea."* Another participant stated, *"I compare the sentence structure in English with Arabic to understand the meaning."* These findings demonstrate that Moroccan learners relied on multiple linguistic resources when processing English reading materials.

Teaching quality also played an important role in shaping how multilingual resources were used. Moroccan participants emphasized the importance of teachers who encouraged comparison among languages and explained differences in meaning and structure. One learner stated, *"When the teacher compares English with French or Arabic, we understand faster."* However, some participants reported that classroom practices were sometimes influenced by examination demands, resulting in greater emphasis on grammar accuracy and vocabulary learning rather than analytical reading. The comparative findings suggest that contextual differences do not change the fundamental role of metalinguistic awareness but influence how learners develop and apply it. Indonesian learners tended to rely more on Indonesian and local language connections, whereas Moroccan learners frequently utilized Arabic and French as linguistic bridges. In both contexts, high-quality teaching served as an important mechanism that transformed learners' multilingual knowledge into effective reading strategies. The findings can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Cross-Cultural Differences in Metalinguistic Awareness, Teaching Quality, and English Reading Development between Indonesian and Moroccan EFL Learners

Research Focus	Interview Questions	Indonesia Findings	Morocco Findings
Multilingual influence	How do your other languages help you learn English?	Learners relied on Indonesian and local languages to interpret meaning	Learners used Arabic, Amazigh, and French to support English learning
Vocabulary development	How do you understand unfamiliar English words?	Students used translation and contextual guessing strategies	Students used cognates and cross-language comparisons
Reading strategies	What strategies help you understand English texts?	Learners emphasized vocabulary analysis and teacher explanation	Learners emphasized linguistic comparison and semantic interpretation
Teaching practices	What classroom activities improve your reading ability?	Discussion, explanation, and contextual examples were valued	Language comparison and explicit strategy instruction were valued

Classroom challenges	What difficulties affect your English reading development?	Limited exposure and textbook-focused activities	Multilingual complexity and examination-oriented learning
Relationship between MA and teaching quality	How does teaching influence your language awareness?	Teacher guidance helped learners analyze English structures	Teacher mediation helped learners connect multiple languages

The findings in Table 2 indicate that contextual differences between Indonesia and Morocco influence the ways learners develop and apply metalinguistic awareness in English reading activities. Although learners from both contexts demonstrated similar processes of analyzing language forms and using previous linguistic knowledge, the sources of linguistic support differed according to their multilingual backgrounds. Indonesian learners commonly relied on Indonesian and local languages to interpret English vocabulary, understand sentence meanings, and construct connections between familiar and unfamiliar linguistic forms. Meanwhile, Moroccan learners utilized Arabic, Amazigh, and French as additional linguistic resources to support English learning. These differences illustrate that metalinguistic awareness is not developed independently from learners' linguistic environments but is shaped by opportunities to compare, analyze, and transfer knowledge across languages. The findings support the perspective that multilingual learners can benefit from cross-linguistic awareness when classroom practices encourage strategic use of their complete linguistic repertoires.

Table 2 also reveals that teaching quality serves as a contextual mediator that influences whether multilingual resources contribute positively to English reading development. In both Indonesia and Morocco, learners reported greater benefits when teachers encouraged explanation, comparison among languages, discussion of meaning, and reflection on linguistic patterns. However, differences in educational contexts shaped the instructional approaches experienced by students. Indonesian learners highlighted challenges related to limited English exposure and textbook-oriented activities, whereas Moroccan learners emphasized the complexity of multilingual classroom environments and the influence of examination-oriented practices. These findings suggest that improving English reading performance requires context-sensitive instructional approaches that recognize learners' linguistic backgrounds while promoting analytical engagement with English. Therefore, the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, teaching quality, and reading development should be understood as dynamic and context-dependent, where effective teaching practices bridge learners' existing linguistic knowledge with new English learning experiences.

Discussion

The present study provides evidence that metalinguistic awareness functions as an important cognitive-linguistic resource that supports learners' English reading development, particularly through learners' ability to analyze word structures, interpret grammatical relationships, and construct meaning from texts. The findings revealed that learners who consciously reflected on linguistic forms tended to employ more strategic reading approaches, such as identifying affixes, examining sentence structures, and using contextual clues to infer meaning. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that metalinguistic awareness contributes to reading development by supporting decoding, vocabulary growth, spelling, reading fluency, and comprehension processes (Lee et al., 2022; Levesque et al., 2020; Ruan et al., 2022). Previous research has demonstrated that morphological awareness, in particular, enables learners to recognize meaningful units within words and use morphological knowledge to interpret unfamiliar

vocabulary. The current findings extend this understanding by showing that learners themselves perceive morphological analysis as a practical strategy during English reading activities. Rather than functioning only as an implicit cognitive ability, metalinguistic awareness appeared in this study as an active learning strategy used by students when encountering challenging texts.

The findings also support previous evidence regarding the multidimensional nature of metalinguistic awareness. Earlier studies have shown that phonological, morphological, orthographic, and syntactic awareness contribute differently to language processing depending on learners' linguistic backgrounds and the characteristics of the target language (Gottardo et al., 2021; Haase & Steinbrink, 2022). In this study, learners particularly emphasized morphological and syntactic awareness because these dimensions helped them understand unfamiliar words and complex sentence structures. This finding is compatible with research demonstrating that morphological awareness contributes to reading comprehension beyond basic vocabulary knowledge because learners can recognize relationships among words and interpret meanings more efficiently (Justi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022). However, the present study expands previous research by illustrating how learners actively describe and apply metalinguistic strategies during classroom reading activities. While previous studies have frequently examined metalinguistic awareness through assessment instruments and literacy outcomes, this qualitative investigation provides insight into the processes through which learners consciously engage with linguistic information.

The role of English language teaching quality emerged as another important finding of this study. The results indicate that teaching quality does not merely provide language input but creates the instructional conditions necessary for learners to activate and develop metalinguistic awareness. Participants emphasized that teacher explanations, analytical questioning, feedback, and classroom discussions encouraged them to think about how English functions rather than simply memorize rules. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that effective language teaching requires cognitive activation, scaffolding, meaningful feedback, and opportunities for learners to reflect on linguistic forms (Baytar & Çakır, 2022; Koç, 2022; Rasool et al., 2024). The findings further support the argument that metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality should not be considered separate influences because classroom practices determine whether learners' cognitive resources are transformed into meaningful language performance.

The interaction between metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality identified in this study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the complementary relationship between learner internal resources and external instructional support. Previous research has often investigated metalinguistic awareness as an individual learner characteristic or teaching quality as an instructional factor independently. However, the current findings suggest that reading development occurs through the interaction between what learners bring to the learning process and what teachers provide through classroom practices. Learners with existing awareness of linguistic structures benefited more when teachers provided opportunities for analysis and reflection, while learners with limited awareness developed stronger understanding when teachers explicitly modeled linguistic thinking processes. This finding supports sociocognitive perspectives of language learning, which view learning as the result of interaction between individual cognition and educational environments.

The comparative findings between Indonesia and Morocco further demonstrate that metalinguistic awareness is strongly influenced by multilingual contexts. Although learners in both countries used metalinguistic strategies to support English reading, the linguistic resources available to them differed. Indonesian learners frequently relied on

Indonesian and regional languages, whereas Moroccan learners utilized Arabic, Amazigh, and French as additional resources for understanding English. These findings confirm previous studies indicating that cross-linguistic transfer contributes to second-language development but is mediated by language distance, orthographic characteristics, exposure, and instructional conditions (Gottardo et al., 2021; Li & Koda, 2025). The findings also support research on translanguaging, which suggests that multilingual learners benefit when they are allowed to use their complete linguistic repertoire to compare forms, meanings, and structures across languages (Madkur et al., 2022; Muqarshi & Kaparou, 2023; R'boul & Belhiah, 2023).

Nevertheless, the study reveals contextual differences in how multilingual resources are integrated into English learning. Indonesian learners reported that translation and contextual explanation were frequently used to understand English texts, but they also identified challenges related to limited exposure and textbook-oriented activities. Moroccan learners, in contrast, demonstrated greater reliance on multilingual comparisons involving Arabic and French, although examination-oriented practices sometimes limited opportunities for deeper linguistic analysis. These findings extend previous research by demonstrating that multilingualism itself does not automatically enhance English reading development; rather, its effectiveness depends on whether classroom environments encourage analytical engagement with languages. This supports previous arguments that translanguaging should be strategically implemented as a pedagogical resource rather than simply viewed as informal language mixing.

The findings also contribute to discussions regarding EFL instructional reform. Previous studies have reported that many EFL classrooms remain dominated by grammar explanation, vocabulary memorization, and reproductive exercises, limiting learners' opportunities to analyze and manipulate linguistic forms (Haerazi, 2023; Febrianto, 2021). The current study confirms this challenge but provides additional insight by showing that learners themselves recognize the difference between surface-level instruction and reflective learning activities. Students reported greater benefits from classroom practices that involved questioning, explanation of language relationships, and interpretation of meaning. Therefore, improving English reading development requires instructional approaches that combine explicit language analysis with communicative and comprehension-oriented activities. This study advances the existing body of knowledge by proposing an integrated understanding of metalinguistic awareness and teaching quality within multilingual EFL contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that metalinguistic awareness and English language teaching quality represent complementary dimensions that contribute to learners' English reading development in middle-school EFL contexts. The findings demonstrate that learners who actively reflect on linguistic forms, including word structures, grammatical patterns, and meaning relationships, develop more effective strategies for interpreting English texts. Metalinguistic awareness enables learners to move beyond memorization toward strategic language processing, allowing them to infer meanings, monitor comprehension, and analyze linguistic relationships. However, the development of such awareness does not occur independently. High-quality English language teaching provides essential scaffolding through explicit explanation, analytical questioning, feedback, and classroom interaction. The study therefore highlights that successful reading development emerges from the interaction between learners' cognitive-linguistic resources and supportive instructional environments.

The study further concludes that the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, teaching quality, and reading development is context-dependent and shaped by multilingual realities. Indonesian and Moroccan learners demonstrated similar tendencies to use previous linguistic knowledge to support English learning, but the specific languages and strategies involved reflected their distinct sociolinguistic environments. Indonesian learners commonly utilized Indonesian and local languages, whereas Moroccan learners benefited from Arabic, Amazigh, and French linguistic resources. These findings emphasize the importance of context-sensitive EFL instruction that recognizes multilingualism as a potential resource for language learning. The study contributes a broader understanding of English reading development by showing that learner awareness, teacher practices, and linguistic context should be examined together rather than separately.

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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. AI assistance was limited to language refinement, organization of ideas, and improvement of academic expression. The conceptual framework, research design, data interpretation, findings, and scholarly arguments were developed and verified by the authors based on the collected research data and relevant academic literature. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this manuscript.

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