







## ARTICLE

# The Resilience Quotient: What Keeps EFL Learners Going When Language Gets Tough

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## ABSTRACT

Cognitive resilience is essential for EFL learners to overcome linguistic, psychological, and environmental challenges, yet its role in language learning remains underexplored. While research has examined motivation, self-regulation, and emotional resilience, cognitive resilience as an adaptive mechanism in EFL learning has received limited attention. This study aims to synthesise existing research to examine how cognitive resilience influences EFL learners' adaptation to challenges, identify pedagogical and psychological strategies that foster resilience, and explore the role of social and environmental factors in resilience development. Employing Booth et al.'s (2021) systematic review model, this study reviewed 46 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 investigating resilience-related factors in EFL contexts. The findings reveal that cognitive flexibility, metacognitive strategies, and self-regulation are critical in helping learners navigate learning difficulties. At the same time, teacher support, parental involvement, and peer collaboration significantly shape resilience development. Despite these insights, empirical research on resilience-based interventions in EFL curricula is lacking, emphasising the need for structured pedagogical approaches. This study highlights the importance of integrating resilience-focused strategies into EFL instruction to enhance learners' ability to manage setbacks and sustain motivation. Future research should explore intervention-based approaches, cultural variations in resilience development, and the

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neurocognitive mechanisms underlying adaptive learning behaviours to support long-term success in language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Resilience; EFL Learning; Metacognitive Strategies; Self-Regulation; Resilience-Based Interventions

## 1. Introduction

Despite years of study, why do some English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners persist and thrive while others struggle with anxiety, disengagement, and stagnation? Why do two students with similar linguistic abilities exhibit vastly different levels of motivation and persistence in mastering English as a foreign language? These questions highlight an underexplored yet crucial factor in language learning: cognitive resilience. Research suggests that affective and psychological factors, such as self-regulation, motivation, and adaptability, significantly influence language learning success beyond linguistic competence<sup>[1,2]</sup>. However, while traditional EFL instruction prioritises vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, it often neglects the psychological and cognitive mechanisms that enable learners to sustain the effort, regulate emotions, and adapt to setbacks<sup>[3,4]</sup>. This gap in focus may explain why many students abandon their language-learning journey when faced with challenges such as language anxiety, cognitive overload, and negative self-perception<sup>[5,6]</sup>. Therefore, understanding how cognitive resilience functions in EFL learning is crucial for developing more adaptive, supportive, and psychologically informed language instruction.

Resilience, broadly defined as an individual's ability to navigate challenges, maintain motivation, and adapt to adversity, has been extensively studied in psychology and education. Research in general education suggests resilient learners demonstrate more remarkable persistence, self-regulation, and adaptability, allowing them to overcome academic challenges and sustain engagement despite difficulties<sup>[7,8]</sup>. In higher education, studies have shown that students with strong resilience skills are more likely to recover from academic setbacks, adjust to new learning environments, and persist in their educational pursuits<sup>[9,10]</sup>. This research underscores the importance of resilience as a predictor of academic success, particularly in contexts where learning involves continuous adaptation and skill refinement.

While general resilience has been widely explored in education and psychology, this review takes a more focused approach by examining cognitive resilience, which refers to a

learner's ability to maintain focus, adjust strategies, and persist in mentally demanding tasks over time<sup>[11,12]</sup>. This concept differs from emotional resilience, which highlights managing emotional stress<sup>[13,14]</sup>, and psychological resilience, which involves broader traits like optimism or grit<sup>[7]</sup>. Cognitive resilience is more dynamic and context-dependent, often shown in how learners respond to setbacks, monitor their learning, and employ metacognitive strategies in real time<sup>[3,8,15]</sup>. By clarifying these differences, this review focuses on cognitive resilience as a teachable and supportable quality, rather than a fixed trait, essential in EFL settings where learners continuously face linguistic and cognitive challenges.

In applied linguistics, studies have increasingly recognised the role of psychological and cognitive factors in language learning success. Dornyei and Ryan (2015) introduced the concept of motivation and self-regulation as key determinants of sustained language learning effort<sup>[1]</sup>, highlighting that learners who possess strong self-efficacy and adaptive coping strategies are more likely to persist in mastering a foreign language. Similarly, Taheri et al. (2019) explored the concept of language learner resilience<sup>[4]</sup>, emphasising that learners who develop positive emotional responses to setbacks and engage in self-regulated learning strategies tend to outperform their peers in long-term language acquisition.

A related body of research has examined the impact of metacognitive strategies on educational resilience. Oxford (2017) argued that metacognitive awareness and strategy allow learners to manage their emotions, regulate their study habits, and adapt their learning approaches when facing challenges<sup>[3]</sup>. Additionally, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) examined the role of language anxiety and emotion regulation in EFL learning<sup>[2]</sup>, demonstrating that learners who develop coping mechanisms for managing frustration and self-doubt tend to exhibit greater linguistic risk-taking and communicative confidence. These studies suggest that resilience is not an innate trait but a developable skill that can be fostered through structured interventions, targeted pedagogical strategies, and supportive learning environments.

Although resilience has been widely examined in edu-

cation and psychology, its specific function and development in EFL learning contexts remain insufficiently explored, particularly regarding cognitive resilience. Much of the existing research focuses on related constructs such as motivation, language anxiety, or self-regulation as isolated variables, without examining how cognitive resilience operates as an integrated, adaptive mechanism that enables learners to persist through linguistic and emotional challenges<sup>[1,3]</sup>. Moreover, while several studies underscore the value of metacognitive strategies and learner autonomy in enhancing resilience, there is limited systematic synthesis of how these findings translate into practical, resilience-based interventions in EFL pedagogy<sup>[4,6]</sup>. In particular, the role of educators and structured instructional practices in cultivating cognitive resilience remains under-theorized, with most studies emphasizing individual traits rather than contextual or pedagogical influences<sup>[8,10,16]</sup>. To address this gap, the present study systematically synthesizes current research on cognitive resilience in EFL contexts and highlights pedagogical strategies that can support its development across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

Educators and policymakers risk overlooking a crucial factor influencing learners' persistence and success without a comprehensive understanding of cognitive resilience in EFL contexts. Research indicates that resilience is a key predictor of academic persistence, particularly in language learning, where students must overcome repeated setbacks and adapt to linguistics<sup>[3,10]</sup>. A lack of resilience-oriented approaches in EFL instruction may contribute to higher dropout rates, increased language anxiety, and reduced motivation, negatively impacting long-term language acquisition<sup>[1,6]</sup>. Studies suggest that learners with low resilience are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and avoidance behaviours, ultimately hindering their progress in mastering a foreign language<sup>[2,5]</sup>. Additionally, without clear pedagogical strategies to foster resilience, learners may struggle to develop cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation, which are crucial for navigating language learning challenges effectively<sup>[4,8]</sup>. Addressing these gaps is essential for creating a more inclusive, adaptive, and psychologically supportive language learning environment, ensuring students receive the necessary tools to sustain engagement and overcome obstacles in their EFL journey.

This study seeks to synthesise existing research on

cognitive resilience in EFL learning, addressing three key questions: (1) How does cognitive resilience influence EFL learners' ability to adapt to challenges? (2) What pedagogical and psychological strategies effectively foster resilience? (3) How do social and environmental factors contribute to resilience development? Through a systematic literature analysis, this study provides valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers while identifying critical gaps that warrant further exploration. A deeper understanding of cognitive resilience in EFL learning is essential for developing more effective, supportive, and psychologically informed language instruction, ensuring learners achieve linguistic proficiency and build the cognitive and emotional resilience necessary for long-term success.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

This study adopts the Systematic Review Toolbox Model that Booth et al. (2021) developed<sup>[17]</sup>, providing a structured yet flexible framework for conducting conceptually driven literature reviews. This model is especially suitable for exploring complex and evolving constructs like cognitive resilience in EFL learning, where a deep understanding of theoretical relationships is essential. Its focus on thematic synthesis and conceptual integration allows for the inclusion of diverse studies and methodological approaches, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of how resilience is defined, developed, and supported in language learning contexts. By applying this model, this study can uncover patterns, gaps, and practical implications across a wide range of empirical findings, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of cognitive resilience and its pedagogical relevance.

### 2.2. Scoping and Refinement of Review Focus

An initial scoping process was carried out to establish a clear and conceptually grounded review framework. This involved conducting broad exploratory searches across key academic databases to map existing literature on cognitive resilience in EFL learning. The goal was to provide an overview of common constructs and terminologies, identify recurring theoretical models, and evaluate the level of empir-

ical research on the topic. The scoping also helped identify thematic clusters such as self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and socio-emotional adaptation, which later guided the development of inclusion criteria.

Following this, the research team refined the review's focus by iteratively evaluating the scope and relevance of preliminary findings. A draft set of research questions was developed and revised to ensure alignment with the emerging literature and the practical objectives of the review. These finalised questions were designed to examine (1) how cognitive resilience supports EFL learners in coping with academic and linguistic challenges; (2) which pedagogical and psychological strategies contribute to fostering such resilience; and (3) how social and environmental factors shape resilience development. This scoping phase was a critical foundation for ensuring methodological rigour and conceptual clarity in the subsequent study identification and synthesis stages.

### 2.3. Study Identification and Selection

Identifying and selecting relevant studies followed an iterative, conceptually driven approach rather than a strict systematic filtering process. A comprehensive search was conducted using the Publish or Perish application, which gathers results from multiple academic databases including Scopus, PubMed, Crossref, and Google Scholar. These databases were chosen for their broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature in educational psychology, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition. Although Taylor & Francis is not a searchable database within this app, being a publisher rather than a database, 11 relevant articles from Taylor & Francis journals were found through manual screening and accessed via the authors' institutional subscription. These articles were included after being assessed against the same conceptual and methodological standards as other sources.

Search terms were developed to capture direct references to “cognitive resilience” and related constructs that are empirically linked to learners' adaptive functioning under cognitive and emotional stress. Based on prior research<sup>[3,8,11]</sup>, we included search strings such as “*Cognitive resilience AND EFL learners*”, “*Metacognitive strategies*

*AND foreign language learning*”, “*Self-regulation AND language learning*”, and “*Psychological resilience AND language anxiety*”. These terms were selected to reflect the broader conceptual ecosystem of cognitive resilience in EFL contexts, allowing us to capture studies that examine strategic thinking, persistence, emotional regulation, and adaptive learning—all central to the resilience construct in language education.

Unlike traditional systematic reviews that follow fixed inclusion and exclusion criteria from the outset, this review employed a flexible, adaptive approach. Studies were assessed based on methodological rigour and theoretical relevance to resilience research in EFL contexts. The inclusion criteria specified that studies must be peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, written in English, and focused specifically on EFL learners (excluding native speaker contexts). This 10-year window was selected to ensure coverage of the most recent decade of scholarship, reflecting current theoretical developments and post-2015 pedagogical shifts in second language instruction. Notably, some studies listed as 2025 publications refer to early-access articles already indexed by academic databases. These were included to ensure that the review remains up to date with the latest research. Both quantitative and qualitative designs were accepted to allow for a comprehensive synthesis of empirical data and theoretical insight. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on language proficiency without linking to resilience-related variables or lacked sufficient methodological transparency.

The selection process unfolded in multiple iterative phases. The initial database search yielded 974 results. After removing duplicates, 810 studies remained for title and abstract screening. This phase resulted in the exclusion of studies that were irrelevant, duplicative in scope, or lacked psychological or cognitive frameworks. A total of 628 articles proceeded to full-text review, during which each study was assessed against the review's conceptual framework. Ultimately, 46 studies were selected for final synthesis based on their substantive contribution to understanding cognitive resilience in EFL learning. To illustrate this process clearly, **Table 1** summarises the identification and selection stages.

**Table 1.** Summary of Study Identification and Selection Process.

Stage	Description	Number of Studies
Initial database search	Articles retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, Crossref, and Google Scholar via the <i>Publish or Perish App</i>	974
Additional source inclusion	Taylor & Francis articles accessed via institutional subscription	11
Duplicate removal	Duplicates eliminated from the initial pool	164 removed
Title and abstract screening	Relevance assessed based on resilience and EFL focus	821 → 628 selected
Full-text review	Theoretical contribution and methodological clarity assessed	628 → 46 selected
Final inclusion	Studies included in the synthesis and analysis	46

This adaptive and conceptually focused approach enabled a more nuanced and targeted selection of studies, ensuring that the final pool of literature provides theoretical depth and practical relevance to exploring cognitive resilience in EFL education.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

The extracted data were analysed using thematic synthesis, following Booth et al.'s (2021) evidence synthesis model as the primary analytical framework<sup>[17]</sup>. This approach enabled the integration of both empirical and conceptual studies while facilitating the interpretation of patterns across diverse educational contexts. The PRISMA 2020 reporting standards also guided the analysis to ensure transparency in the selection and synthesis process. Lochmiller's (2021) qualitative analysis principles further informed coding procedures and theme development, which support using deductive and inductive strategies in theme generation.

An initial coding framework was developed deductively, anchored in the study's core constructs: cognitive resilience, metacognitive strategies, and external support systems. As the analysis progressed, the framework was revised inductively to accommodate emerging subthemes, conceptual variations, and context-specific insights across the selected studies. Two researchers independently coded the data using a structured matrix capturing study context, participant characteristics, theoretical orientation, and key findings. This independent coding process ensured consistency while facilitating the identification of recurring conceptual elements relevant to the research questions.

Intercoder reliability was achieved through a negotiated agreement process. After completing independent analysis, both researchers discussed discrepancies and reached consensus through iterative dialogue. This procedure aligns with the qualitative synthesis standards that O'Connor and Joffe (2020) proposed<sup>[18]</sup>, emphasising interpretive agreement over

statistical metrics such as Cohen's Kappa. Rigour and credibility were reinforced through triangulation, repeated comparisons, and reflective discussion. As a result, three overarching themes were identified: (1) the role of cognitive resilience in managing academic and affective challenges, (2) the impact of pedagogical and psychological interventions in fostering resilience, and (3) the influence of social and environmental contexts in shaping resilience development. These findings contribute to a theory-informed understanding of resilience within EFL learning environments.

The data extraction phase followed a structured yet adaptable coding framework that captured key elements from the selected studies. Extracted data included authorship, publication year, research design, sample characteristics, theoretical framework, and key findings related to cognitive resilience in EFL. Thematic patterns were identified across studies to explore how resilience is conceptualised, how it influences learners' adaptation, and the strategies educators and policymakers can use to enhance resilience in EFL education. To ensure methodological rigour, studies were appraised based on Booth et al.'s (2021) evidence synthesis criteria, assessing relevance, rigour, and conceptual depth<sup>[17]</sup>. This evaluation helped maintain theoretical integrity, ensuring that only studies offering substantive contributions to resilience theory were included in the synthesis.

## 2.5. Synthesis of Findings

Following Booth et al.'s (2021) conceptually driven review framework<sup>[17]</sup>, a thematic synthesis approach was used to analyse and organise the data extracted from the selected studies. The process began with systematic data extraction using a custom-coded spreadsheet, where each study's objectives, methods, and key findings related to cognitive resilience were documented. A coding matrix was created using Microsoft Excel to support cross-study comparison. Through open coding, we assigned labels to recurring concepts such

as emotional regulation, metacognitive control, learner autonomy, and teacher support. Both inductive and deductive approaches were used, allowing emergent themes to develop while aligning coding with the research questions and conceptual definitions established during the scoping phase.

Initial codes were reviewed and grouped into broader categories through thematic clustering. Coding decisions were revisited multiple times to ensure consistency and clarity. Although intercoder agreement was not formally measured, codes were cross-checked among the authors to improve reliability. This process led to three main themes: (1) how EFL learners adapt to linguistic and psychological challenges; (2) strategies that promote resilience; and (3) the influence of social and environmental factors in developing resilience. These themes provided the foundation for the synthesis, allowing the review to go beyond simple descriptions to a theory-based interpretation of patterns, contradictions, and research gaps in the literature.

### 3. Results

This section highlights the main findings from the systematic literature review on cognitive resilience in EFL learning. The findings are organised thematically based on the research questions and patterns found across the selected studies. Three main themes emerged: (1) how cognitive resilience helps EFL learners adapt to challenges, (2) teaching and psychological strategies to build resilience, and (3) the impact of social and environmental factors on developing cognitive resilience. Each theme is based on the theoretical and empirical evidence from the reviewed research.

#### 3.1. Cognitive Resilience and EFL Learners' Adaptation to Challenges

Findings from the reviewed studies emphasise the important role of cognitive resilience in helping EFL learners handle the academic and psychological challenges involved in

language learning. Research consistently shows that learners with higher resilience demonstrate greater persistence, motivation, and self-efficacy, allowing them to continue progressing despite language anxiety, cognitive overload, and negative attitudes toward English<sup>[33]</sup>. These findings imply that resilience is vital in learners' ability to adapt to the demands of learning a foreign language and stay engaged over time.

A central component of cognitive resilience is cognitive flexibility, which allows learners to adjust their learning strategies, reinterpret challenges as opportunities for growth, and sustain motivation despite setbacks<sup>[19]</sup>. Empirical studies suggest that learners with more significant cognitive flexibility are more adept at modifying their study approaches, identifying alternative solutions to learning difficulties, and persisting through obstacles, ultimately improving their language learning experience. Similarly, Ganguly and Perera<sup>[20]</sup> identify distinct resilience profiles among EFL learners, distinguishing between highly engaged, self-regulated students and vulnerable learners who struggle to manage emotional and cognitive barriers<sup>[20]</sup>. These findings underscore the variability in learners' resilience capacities and highlight the need for targeted interventions to support students with lower resilience levels.

The ability to self-regulate learning processes also emerged as a fundamental aspect of cognitive resilience. Studies indicate that resilient learners actively employ metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and cognitive reframing, to manage learning difficulties effectively<sup>[21]</sup>. Goal-setting enables learners to establish structured learning objectives, while self-monitoring promotes awareness of progress and necessary adjustments to learning approaches. Cognitive reframing further supports resilience by helping learners reinterpret challenges constructively, reducing frustration, and fostering long-term engagement. **Table 2** presents the key aspects of cognitive resilience in EFL adaptation alongside supporting studies to provide a synthesised overview of these findings<sup>[19,21,22]</sup>.

**Table 2.** Cognitive Resilience and EFL Learners' Adaptation to Challenges.

Key Aspect	Description	Supporting Studies
Persistence and Motivation	Learners with higher resilience levels demonstrate more remarkable persistence, motivation, and self-efficacy, enabling them to overcome language anxiety and cognitive overload.	Parsons et al. (2016), Ermis-Demirtas et al. (2018), Najafzadeh et al. (2018), Abdolrezaipoor et al. (2023), and Yang and Wang (2022).

Table 2. *Cont.*

Key Aspect	Description	Supporting Studies
Cognitive Flexibility	Cognitive flexibility allows learners to adjust learning strategies, reframe difficulties as opportunities, and maintain engagement in EFL learning.	Hunsu et al. (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> , Avarzamani and Farahian (2017), and Nugiel et al. (2023).
Resilience Profiles	Different resilience profiles exist among EFL learners, differentiating highly engaged, self-regulated students from those who struggle with adaptive coping mechanisms.	Hunsu et al. (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> , Avarzamani and Farahian (2017), and Nugiel et al. (2023).
Self-Regulation Strategies	Self-regulation supports learners in managing setbacks, maintaining motivation, and sustaining progress through metacognitive approaches.	Shatkin et al. (2016) <sup>[21]</sup> , Suranata et al. (2020) <sup>[22]</sup> , and Graesser and McNamara (2010).
Metacognitive Strategies	Goal-setting, self-monitoring, and cognitive reframing enable learners to navigate challenges effectively and sustain long-term engagement.	Shatkin et al. (2016) <sup>[21]</sup> , Hunsu et al. (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> , and Estrapala et al. (2022).

### 3.2. Pedagogical and Psychological Strategies for Fostering Resilience in EFL Learners

Findings indicate that pedagogical and psychological strategies foster resilience among EFL learners. Research highlights that explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies, cognitive-behavioural interventions, and narrative-based learning significantly enhances learners' ability to manage challenges, regulate emotions, and maintain engagement in language learning<sup>[19,22]</sup>.

Studies on metacognitive strategy instruction show that learners who receive explicit training in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning processes demon-

strate greater adaptability and resilience when facing linguistic challenges<sup>[19]</sup>. Similarly, research on cognitive-behavioural interventions (CBIs) suggests that guided self-reflection and mindfulness-based techniques help learners reduce anxiety, regulate emotions, and develop motivation coping mechanisms<sup>[21]</sup>. Additionally, findings indicate that narrative-based learning approaches, which include storytelling and personal reflection, help learners internalise resilience-building strategies and maintain a positive mindset toward language learning (Theron et al., 2017). **Table 3** provides an overview of these pedagogical and psychological strategies and supports studies.

Table 3. Pedagogical and Psychological Strategies for Fostering Resilience in EFL Learners<sup>[19,21,22]</sup>.

Strategy	Findings	Supporting Studies
Metacognitive Strategy Training	Learners who receive explicit instruction in metacognitive skills, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, exhibit greater adaptability and resilience in EFL learning.	Hunsu et al. (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> , Suranata et al. (2020) <sup>[22]</sup> , Sudiatama et al. (2023), Saadillah and Nor (2017), and Paratiwi (2016).
Cognitive-behavioural Interventions (CBIs)	CBIs, including mindfulness techniques and guided self-reflection, help learners regulate emotions, manage stress, and sustain engagement in language learning.	Shatkin et al. (2016) <sup>[21]</sup> , Ghanizadeh et al. (2019), and Moghadam et al. (2020).
Narrative-Based Learning	Storytelling and personal reflection support resilience by reinforcing learners' ability to reframe challenges and persist in language acquisition.	Theron et al. (2017), Nguyen et al. (2015) and Ayoobiyan and Rashidi (2021).

### 3.3. The Influence of Social and Environmental Factors on Cognitive Resilience Development

Findings indicate that social and environmental factors significantly shape cognitive resilience in EFL learners. Research suggests that teacher support, parental involvement, and peer interactions are pivotal in helping learners manage academic stress, adapt to learning challenges, and persist in

language acquisition<sup>[23,24]</sup>.

The role of teacher-student relationships is particularly prominent. Findings indicate that learners who perceive their teachers as supportive demonstrate higher resilience and a greater willingness to take risks in language learning<sup>[20]</sup>. Parental involvement also emerged as a key factor, with studies suggesting that learners who receive parental encouragement and mediated learning strategies develop higher self-efficacy and greater perseverance in overcoming language

difficulties<sup>[25]</sup>. Additionally, peer support in collaborative learning environments has enhanced resilience by fostering adaptive coping strategies and sustained motivation<sup>[24,26]</sup>.

**Table 4** summarises the key social and environmental factors that influence cognitive resilience development in EFL learners, along with supporting studies<sup>[7,20,24–27]</sup>.

**Table 4.** Social and Environmental Factors Influencing Cognitive Resilience in EFL Learners.

Factor	Findings	Supporting Studies
Teacher Support	Students who perceive their teachers as supportive exhibit higher resilience and are more willing to take risks in language learning.	Ganguly & Perera (2019) <sup>[20]</sup> , Kim et al. (2019) and Li (2022).
Parental Involvement	Parental encouragement and mediated learning strategies enhance learners' self-efficacy and perseverance in overcoming language learning challenges.	Iwaniec (2016) <sup>[25]</sup> , Zhang and Zou (2024), Sumanti and Muljani (2021), Davenport et al. (2025), and Graesser and McNamara (2010).
Peer Support	Collaborative learning, mentorship, and group discussions strengthen resilience by fostering adaptive coping strategies and sustained motivation.	Twum-Antwi et al. (2020) <sup>[24]</sup> , Fuente et al. (2017) <sup>[26]</sup> , Masten (2018) <sup>[7]</sup> , Ungar (2015) <sup>[27]</sup> , and Li (2022).

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review emphasise the critical role of cognitive resilience in EFL learning, demonstrating how it enables learners to cope with linguistic complexity, psychological strain, and shifting learning environments. Challenging the traditional notion of resilience as a fixed personal trait, the evidence synthesised in this review supports its characterisation as a dynamic, context-dependent capacity that can be fostered through intentional pedagogical, psychological, and social interventions. While this aligns with broader educational research on resilience<sup>[7,10]</sup>, the application in EFL contexts reveals additional nuance: learners not only contend with academic demands but also with emotional factors such as language anxiety, low self-efficacy, and identity-related stress. Notably, the reviewed studies varied in how resilience was conceptualised, some treating it as a product of internal regulation, others as a socially mediated outcome, highlighting a lack of definitional consensus that limits direct comparison across studies and warrants further theoretical clarification.

One of the most significant insights from this review is that cognitive resilience functions as a psychological buffer against language anxiety, cognitive overload, and negative attitudes toward English. Several studies confirm that resilient learners demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and persistence, allowing them to sustain motivation despite difficulties<sup>[1,8]</sup>. These findings align with socio-cognitive theories of learning, which emphasise that students who develop adaptive coping mechanisms are more likely to engage actively in learning, persevere in the face

of setbacks, and ultimately achieve greater academic success<sup>[11,26,28]</sup>. Notably, the reviewed studies highlight cognitive flexibility as a central mechanism in resilience, reinforcing the argument that learners who can adapt their strategies and reframe challenges as opportunities for growth are more likely to persist in language learning<sup>[2,3]</sup>. This resonates with the theory of adaptive expertise, which suggests that successful learners continuously adjust their cognitive and emotional responses to learning barriers<sup>[12]</sup>.

The role of metacognitive strategies in fostering resilience is another key theme from the literature. Studies consistently demonstrate that goal-setting, self-monitoring, and cognitive reframing are essential tools for managing setbacks and sustaining engagement in EFL learning<sup>[29,30]</sup>. Learners who engage in metacognitive reflection are better equipped to navigate linguistic difficulties and are more likely to develop long-term learning autonomy<sup>[3]</sup>. Furthermore, research on self-regulated learning suggests that metacognitive strategies enable learners to reframe challenges as part of the learning process, reducing emotional distress and reinforcing perseverance<sup>[31]</sup>. These findings suggest that explicit metacognitive instruction should be integrated into EFL curricula, providing learners with structured opportunities to develop resilience-oriented strategies<sup>[32]</sup>.

In addition to cognitive and metacognitive factors, psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioural interventions (CBIs), guided self-reflection, and mindfulness techniques have been shown to reduce anxiety and enhance resilience in EFL learners effectively<sup>[2,21]</sup>. Cognitive-behavioural interventions, which emphasise emotional regulation and adaptive thinking patterns, are particularly relevant



for EFL learners struggling with anxiety and low confidence in their language abilities. Research in positive psychology and second language acquisition further supports the idea that psychological resilience is closely linked to learners' ability to sustain motivation and self-efficacy<sup>[13]</sup>. As such, implementing psychological support mechanisms within EFL instruction could play a crucial role in mitigating the negative emotional impact of language learning challenges.

Although there is a consensus on the importance of supporting resilience in EFL learners, the studies reviewed show different focuses on the most effective ways to do so. Some studies emphasise cognitive-behavioural interventions (CBIs), mindfulness, and emotional regulation strategies as key methods for improving learners' adaptive abilities<sup>[2,21]</sup>, especially in managing anxiety and enhancing psychological well-being. In contrast, other research highlights the importance of external social supports, such as teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, and parental involvement, as equally or more vital to building resilience<sup>[4]</sup>. This difference suggests that resilience is likely multi-dimensional and influenced by context, requiring a combined approach that includes individual psychological techniques and relational, community-based strategies. Future research should investigate how these areas interact and whether specific learner profiles respond better to one approach over another.

The social dimension of resilience emerged as a critical component in this review, emphasising that resilience is not solely an internal trait but a dynamic capacity shaped by external, relational influences. Learners do not develop resilience in isolation; it is cultivated through consistent interaction with supportive figures such as teachers, peers, and family members<sup>[7,27]</sup>. Teacher support is among the most powerful cognitive and emotional resilience predictors in EFL contexts. Instructors who foster a psychologically safe learning environment, characterised by empathy, encouragement, and constructive feedback, can significantly mitigate learners' language anxiety and promote greater academic confidence<sup>[4,24]</sup>. Moreover, the teacher's role extends beyond instruction to that of a socio-emotional anchor, helping students navigate setbacks and maintain motivation. This relational support enables learners to take risks in communication, persevere through linguistic challenges, and engage more actively in learning. The findings affirm that resilience is socially situated, and the classroom context, especially

the teacher-student dynamic, can hinder or enhance its development. Integrating relational pedagogy and emotionally responsive teaching practices is essential for cultivating resilience in EFL learners.

Furthermore, parental involvement and peer collaboration play significant roles in building resilience, as learners with strong external support systems are better equipped to handle academic setbacks and maintain motivation<sup>[20,25]</sup>. Peer interaction, in particular, has been found to reduce anxiety, foster collaborative problem-solving, and enhance learners' willingness to take risks in communication, reinforcing the importance of socially supportive learning environments<sup>[24]</sup>. These findings underscore the need for EFL programs to incorporate structured social support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, collaborative learning activities, and parental engagement strategies, to enhance learners' resilience and overall academic success.

The findings of this review have important implications for EFL teaching and education policy. EFL curricula should intentionally include resilience-building elements like metacognitive training, psychological support, and social engagement strategies to enhance learners' ability to handle emotional and mental challenges in language learning. Teacher training programs are crucial in this context, as teachers must be equipped with the skills and tools to deliver resilience-focused instruction, such as emotional support, constructive feedback, and encouragement. Incorporating peer-assisted learning and mentorship opportunities into lesson design can also help students develop a sense of community and support, boosting their motivation and perseverance. On a broader scale, education policy should encourage inclusive and psychologically supportive learning environments. Strategies such as structured parental involvement, mindfulness exercises, and cognitive-behavioural techniques can be integrated into classroom activities and institutional policies to promote student well-being and language success.

Despite the contributions of this review, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope of included studies was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, which may have excluded valuable insights from earlier or non-indexed sources such as grey literature, dissertations, or book chapters. Including these in future reviews could broaden the perspective on cognitive resilience. Second, the reviewed studies demon-

strated considerable methodological variation, ranging from qualitative interviews to large-scale surveys and mixed-methods designs, yet few employed robust experimental or longitudinal designs. Additionally, there is no standardised framework or validated tool for assessing cognitive resilience specifically in EFL contexts. This lack of uniformity in operational definitions and measurement tools complicates comparison across studies and limits generalizability. Third, most of the included research focused on university-level learners, with relatively little attention paid to younger EFL learners in primary or secondary education. Since resilience may appear differently at various developmental stages, future studies should investigate age-specific interventions and assessments. Finally, although some studies addressed environmental or social support factors, cultural influences on resilience remain understudied. Comparative research across different cultural and educational systems is necessary because socio-cultural norms can greatly influence learners' motivation and emotional reactions.

To address these gaps, future research should prioritise longitudinal and intervention-based studies investigating how cognitive resilience develops over time and in response to targeted pedagogical strategies. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies examining the effects of metacognitive instruction, cognitive-behavioural approaches, and structured social support mechanisms would help establish evidence-based practices. Developing standardised resilience assessment tools, validated across cultural and linguistic contexts, would also enable more consistent and comparable research outcomes. Such efforts are essential to advance theory, inform policy, and design more adaptive and resilient EFL learning environments.

## 5. Conclusions

This systematic literature review highlights the critical role of cognitive resilience in EFL learning, demonstrating that resilience is not an inherent trait but a developable skill that enables learners to overcome linguistic, psychological, and environmental challenges. The findings suggest that cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, and metacognitive strategies are key mechanisms through which resilience functions, allowing learners to adapt learning strategies, sustain moti-

vation, and manage setbacks. Additionally, pedagogical and psychological interventions, such as explicit metacognitive training, cognitive-behavioural techniques, and narrative-based learning, have been identified as effective in fostering resilience and reducing language anxiety. The study also emphasises the importance of social and environmental factors, particularly teacher support, parental involvement, and peer collaboration, in shaping Learners' ability to persist in language learning despite difficulties.

The implications of these findings suggest that EFL instruction should incorporate resilience-focused approaches that integrate cognitive, psychological, and social dimensions into curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional policies. Given the gaps in existing research, future studies should explore longitudinal and intervention-based approaches to resilience-building in diverse EFL contexts. More research is needed to examine cultural and contextual variations in resilience development and the neurocognitive mechanisms underlying adaptive learning behaviours. By prioritising resilience-enhancing strategies in language education policy and practice, educators and researchers can better support EFL learners in developing the persistence, motivation, and adaptability necessary for long-term success in language acquisition.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.A. and N.S.; methodology, M.A., N.S. and F.M.I.; software, A.M.; validation, M.A., N.S. and F.M.I.; formal analysis, M.A. and D.S.; investigation, M.A. and N.E.K.; resources, N.E.K. and D.S.; data curation, M.A. and N.E.K.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A.; writing—review and editing, N.S., F.M.I. and D.S.; visualization, A.M.; supervision, N.S.; project administration, M.A.; funding acquisition, M.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. This study is a systematic literature review and did not involve human participants, animals, or the collection of personal data.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study is a systematic literature review and did not involve human participants, personal data collection, or identifiable patient information.

## Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. All sources of data supporting the reported results are derived from publicly available articles and can be accessed through the Publish or Perish application, which includes databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Crossref, and Google Scholar.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study, in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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