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## Happy Minds, Effective Learners: Investigating the Impact of Metacognitive Strategies on Foreign Language Enjoyment

Qin Lai <sup>ORCID</sup>, Bity Salwana Alias <sup>\* ORCID</sup>, Aida Hanim A. Hamid <sup>ORCID</sup>

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 43600, Malaysia

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate relationship between metacognitive strategies and foreign language enjoyment (FLE), emphasizing the dynamic interplay between cognitive regulation techniques and emotional experiences in the language learning process. Metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluation—play a pivotal role in shaping learners’ emotional and cognitive engagement, which are critical for fostering motivation and reducing language anxiety. Enhancing students’ enjoyment through these strategies is essential for developing educational practices that prioritize both intellectual growth and emotional well-being. Employing a qualitative approach, the study utilizes in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore learners’ experiences and perceptions of metacognitive strategies. By analyzing participants’ narratives, the research identifies key patterns and themes that reveal how these strategies influence FLE across varying levels of enjoyment and language proficiency. Participants who actively engaged in planning and self-reflection reported greater satisfaction and confidence in their language learning, while those with inconsistent strategy use experienced frustration and diminished enjoyment. The findings underscore the transformative potential of metacognition in creating positive and supportive learning environments. Practical implications include integrating metacognitive training into language instruction, promoting self-efficacy, and tailoring approaches to individual learning styles. This research highlights that fostering metacognitive awareness not only enhances learning enjoyment but also leads to improved language proficiency and sustained motivation, supporting both academic success and personal development.

**Keywords:** Effective Learning; Learning Strategy; Metacognitive Strategy; Foreign Language Enjoyment; Language Education

#### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Bity Salwana Alias, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 43600, Malaysia; Email: [bity@ukm.edu.my](mailto:bity@ukm.edu.my)

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## 1. Introduction

The growing interest in enhancing educational experiences has led scholars to increasingly focus on the role of metacognitive strategies in learning. Metacognition, often described as “thinking about thinking,” encompasses the processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s own learning activities<sup>[1]</sup>. These strategies are well-established as critical for academic success, as they enable learners to become more self-regulated and reflective about their learning processes<sup>[2]</sup>.

Constructivism<sup>[3]</sup> serves as a foundational theory, emphasizing that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. Within this paradigm, metacognitive strategies—such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating—are pivotal as they enable learners to take control of their learning processes, thereby fostering deeper engagement and personal agency. This aligns with the research objective to explore how these strategies contribute to enhancing FLE, as greater learner autonomy often leads to increased motivation and positive emotions. Bachman and Palmer’s Model of Strategic Competence<sup>[4]</sup> highlights the role of metacognitive strategies in language performance. According to their model, strategic competence involves the ability to assess communicative goals, select appropriate strategies, and adapt them to specific contexts. This perspective directly informs the current study by suggesting that learners who effectively deploy metacognitive strategies are better equipped to navigate challenges in language learning, potentially reducing anxiety and enhancing enjoyment. Oxford’s<sup>[5]</sup> Classification of Language Learning Strategies provides a detailed taxonomy that positions metacognitive strategies as essential tools for managing one’s learning process. The framework underscores the interplay between cognitive and affective factors, suggesting that metacognitive strategies not only enhance academic performance but also improve emotional well-being by fostering a sense of control and accomplishment. This theoretical insight supports the hypothesis that learners who actively engage in metacognitive practices may experience heightened levels of FLE. Self-Regulation Theory, as elaborated by Zimmerman<sup>[6]</sup>, offers a comprehensive understanding of how learners regulate their cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes. This theory is particularly relevant for the proposed research as it integrates the metacognitive dimension with emotional

outcomes like enjoyment. Self-regulated learners are more likely to set realistic goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies, leading to a more satisfying and enjoyable learning experience. However, in recent years, researchers have extended this focus beyond academic performance to investigate how metacognitive strategies can enhance learning enjoyment, particularly in foreign language acquisition.

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) has emerged as a pivotal affective factor in language learning, encapsulating positive emotions such as joy, interest, and satisfaction experienced during the learning process<sup>[7]</sup>. The affective dimension of language learning is crucial, as positive emotional experiences can boost motivation, reduce anxiety, and enhance overall language performance<sup>[8]</sup>. In this context, the intersection of metacognitive strategies and FLE offers a promising avenue for exploration, providing valuable insights into how fostering metacognitive awareness may lead to more enjoyable and effective learning environments.

Recent global research has underscored the potential of metacognitive strategies to positively affect learners’ emotional well-being and engagement. For instance, Zhang et al.<sup>[9]</sup> demonstrated that learners who employed metacognitive strategies reported higher levels of satisfaction and confidence in their language learning abilities. Similarly, Li et al.<sup>[10]</sup> found that metacognitive awareness was positively correlated with FLE, suggesting that learners who actively engage in self-reflection and strategy use tend to experience greater enjoyment in their language studies. However, while these studies establish the broader benefits of metacognitive strategies, they largely focus on general correlations without delving into the nuanced mechanisms by which specific metacognitive strategies—such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation—impact the emotional dimensions of learning, particularly FLE.

Despite these encouraging findings, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the precise mechanisms by which metacognitive strategies influence FLE. This article seeks to address this gap, particularly in the context of foreign language learners who face unique challenges such as language anxiety and cultural adjustment<sup>[11]</sup>. By investigating these mechanisms, the current study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of the relationship between cognitive processes and affective experiences in language learning. Furthermore, the study highlights the

practical implications for educators, suggesting that integrating metacognitive strategy training into language curricula could not only enhance language performance but also foster more positive, enjoyable learning experiences.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning, an area that remains underexplored. By focusing on FLE as an outcome, the study shifts the conversation toward creating holistic learning environments that prioritize both emotional and intellectual engagement. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for learner-centered approaches in foreign language education.

## 2. Literature Review

Metacognition encompasses the awareness and control of one's cognitive processes<sup>[1]</sup>. This concept has gained considerable attention in educational research due to its significant role in enhancing learning outcomes. Metacognitive strategies, which include planning, monitoring, and evaluating, are tools that learners use to regulate their cognitive activities and optimize learning<sup>[12]</sup>. This literature review examines the theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and practical applications of metacognitive strategies in educational settings. The concept of metacognition was first introduced by John Flavell in the late 1970s. Flavell<sup>[11]</sup> delineated metacognition into two primary components: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. Metacognitive knowledge refers to the understanding of one's cognitive processes, while metacognitive regulation involves the use of strategies to control these processes. This dual framework has provided a foundation for subsequent research and has been instrumental in developing interventions aimed at improving learners' metacognitive skills.

The positive effects of metacognitive strategies on learning outcomes have been well documented across educational contexts. Schraw and Dennison<sup>[13]</sup> developed the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) to assess these strategies, demonstrating that higher MAI scores are associated with better academic performance. A meta-analysis by Veenman et al.<sup>[14]</sup> confirmed these beneficial effects, particularly in reading comprehension and problem-solving tasks. In second language acquisition, Wang and MacIntyre<sup>[15]</sup> showed that learners who engage in metacognitive strategies

perform better and also experience less anxiety, enhancing both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) has gained attention as a key affective factor influencing language acquisition, linked to motivation, engagement, and overall achievement<sup>[16]</sup>. Enjoyment, grounded in positive psychology, refers to positive emotions like pleasure, interest, and excitement during the learning process<sup>[17]</sup>.

Recent studies highlight the positive effects of metacognitive strategies on learners' FLE. For instance, Chamot<sup>[18]</sup> found that metacognitive strategies not only boost academic performance but also lead to greater enjoyment through increased confidence. Li et al.<sup>[19]</sup> similarly noted that metacognitive awareness enhances learners' proficiency, translating into higher enjoyment. More directly, Jiang and Dewaele<sup>[20]</sup> explored how metacognitive strategies impact emotional experiences in language classrooms, showing that learners who actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their processes report higher enjoyment. This is attributed to the sense of control and self-efficacy these strategies foster, reducing anxiety and promoting a positive emotional environment.

These findings demonstrate that various types of metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluating—can influence FLE by enhancing learners' sense of mastery and reducing negative emotions like anxiety. Learners who engage in reflective practices, set clear goals, and regularly assess their progress are more likely to experience enjoyment during language learning.

Several factors influence the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing FLE. Dewaele and MacIntyre<sup>[16]</sup> were among the first to show that learners who experience enjoyment engage more actively in language learning, and their proficiency improves over time. Jin and Zhang<sup>[8]</sup> identified specific factors such as teacher enthusiasm, classroom atmosphere, and engaging teaching methods as contributors to FLE. These findings suggest that external factors, like the learning environment, can amplify the impact of metacognitive strategies on learners' enjoyment.

MacIntyre and Dewaele<sup>[21]</sup> further explored the dynamic between FLE and foreign language anxiety (FLA), showing a reciprocal relationship. While FLA decreases over time, FLE tends to increase as learners become more proficient. The interplay between anxiety and enjoyment suggests

that reducing anxiety through the application of metacognitive strategies—especially strategies related to planning and self-regulation—can enhance the enjoyment learners feel.

Other recent research, such as Oxford’s<sup>[5]</sup>, highlights the role of learner autonomy in maximizing the benefits of metacognitive strategies. Learners who practice self-reflection and goal-setting report higher levels of satisfaction and enjoyment, suggesting that personal motivation and goal orientation are critical factors in leveraging metacognitive strategies for a more fulfilling learning experience.

### 3. Methodology

Qualitative research method was used in the study characterized by a survey design, which could offer a structured and systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data related to the effect of metacognitive strategy in improving foreign language enjoyment among college students. This method provided several advantages for investigating a large sample of participants and allowed for the exploration of patterns, relationships, and trends within the collected data<sup>[22]</sup>.

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews by face to face to answer the questions ‘What are the different effects of different types of metacognitive strategies on

foreign language enjoyment?’ and ‘What are the factors that influence the effect of metacognitive strategies in improving the enjoyment of foreign language learning?’. An interview protocol was designed to explore participants’ use of learning strategies as EFL learners, including their motivations, attitudes, and experiences. The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis in NVivo, a software program for qualitative analysis that allows for the identification of patterns and themes in the data. To ensure the reliability of the survey results, the researchers conducted a member examination, peer reporting and reflection.

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine students. Interviewees were first recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with the participants who had been in close touch with the author. Then nine of them were selected out through purposive sampling to represent varying levels of foreign language enjoyment. Eight of them were male and one female, with three belonging to the high-level foreign language enjoyment group, three belonging to the middle-level, and the rest three belonging to the low-level. More detailed background information is provided in **Table 1**. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese to ease the impact of any language barrier and each lasted about one hour on average.

**Table 1.** Participants’ demographic information.

Participants	Gender	English Proficiency Level	FLE Level
P1	M	High	High
P2	M	High	High
P3	M	Medium	High
P4	M	High	Middle level
P5	M	Medium	Middle level
P6	M	Low	Middle level
P7	F	Low	Low
P8	M	Medium	Low
P9	M	Low	Low

To manage and mitigate potential biases from these prior understandings, several strategies are employed. Self-reports and semi-structured interviews were used to discuss potential biases and preconceptions. These practices enhance the credibility and rigor of research by ensuring that explanations are based on participants’ perspectives rather than preconceived notions. In addition, the use of triangulation in data collection and analysis can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena, which can

provide a richer and more detailed understanding of Chinese college students’ pleasure in foreign language learning and metacognitive strategies. By acknowledging and systematically managing prior understanding, the research team improved the depth and validity of the research. The insights gained from this study contribute to the understanding of English learning strategies and pleasure in foreign language learning among Chinese college students, providing valuable implications for educators and policy makers.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. RQ1 What Are the Different Effects of Different Types of Metacognitive Strategies on Foreign Language Enjoyment?

#### 4.1.1. Theme 1 Planning Strategy

The analysis revealed that participants who employed planning strategies in their foreign language learning reported varying levels of foreign language enjoyment (FLE). The planning strategy, which involves setting specific goals, organizing study schedules, and preparing for language tasks, emerged as a significant factor influencing FLE among participants.

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P1 and P2, emphasized the importance of planning in enhancing their learning experience. P1 stated, *'Setting clear goals for each study session helps me stay focused and motivated. I enjoy seeing my progress.'* This highlights how goal-setting not only provides a sense of direction but also fosters a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Similarly, P2 mentioned, *'I always plan my weekly study schedule. It reduces stress and makes learning more enjoyable because I know what to expect.'* This underscores the role of planning in reducing uncertainty and anxiety, thereby creating a more enjoyable and structured learning environment.

For participants with medium FLE levels, like P4 and P5, the impact of planning was somewhat mixed. P4 noted, *'Planning helps, but sometimes I find it hard to stick to my schedule, which can be frustrating.'* This indicates that while planning can be beneficial, the inability to adhere to plans can lead to frustration and decreased enjoyment. P5 shared, *'I plan my studies, but unexpected events often disrupt my schedule. When I manage to follow my plan, I do feel more accomplished and enjoy the learning process.'* This highlights the importance of flexibility in planning and the impact of external factors on the effectiveness of planning strategies.

Participants with low FLE levels, such as P7 and P9, reported less consistent use of planning strategies. P7 confessed, *'I don't really plan my studies. I just go with the flow, which often leaves me feeling unprepared and stressed.'* This lack of planning leads to feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed, negatively impacting their enjoyment. P9 echoed this sentiment, saying, *'I rarely set goals or plan my study*

*sessions. I think if I had a better plan, I might enjoy learning more.'* This suggests a direct link between the absence of planning and lower levels of enjoyment, indicating that incorporating planning strategies could potentially enhance their learning experience.

#### 4.1.2. Theme 2 Monitoring Strategy

The analysis revealed that monitoring strategies, which involve regularly checking comprehension and progress, play a significant role in influencing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among participants. Monitoring strategies include self-assessment, keeping track of learning progress, and adjusting strategies as needed.

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P1 and P2, frequently utilized monitoring strategies to enhance their learning experiences. P1 mentioned, *'I constantly check my understanding and adjust my learning methods accordingly. It keeps me engaged and ensures I'm on the right track.'* This proactive approach helps maintain motivation and interest. P2 added, *'Reviewing my progress regularly helps me see my improvement, which is very satisfying. It makes the learning process more enjoyable because I can see tangible results.'* These quotes highlight how regular self-assessment and adjustment foster a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Participants with medium FLE levels, like P4 and P5, had mixed experiences with monitoring strategies. P4 stated, *'I try to monitor my progress, but sometimes I get discouraged if I don't see immediate improvements.'* This shows that while monitoring can be beneficial, it can also lead to frustration if progress is not evident. P5 commented, *'Tracking my learning helps, but I often forget to do it regularly. When I do, it definitely makes me feel more in control and happier with my studies.'* This indicates that consistency in monitoring is crucial for maximizing its positive effects on enjoyment.

Participants with low FLE levels, such as P7 and P8, reported minimal use of monitoring strategies, which contributed to their lower levels of enjoyment. P7 confessed, *'I don't really check my progress. I just move on to the next thing, which sometimes makes me feel lost and unmotivated.'* This lack of regular monitoring leads to feelings of disorientation and decreased motivation. P8 echoed this sentiment, saying, *'I rarely assess my learning. If I did, I think I'd feel more confident and enjoy the process more.'* This suggests

that incorporating monitoring strategies could potentially enhance their learning enjoyment by providing a clearer sense of direction and progress.

#### 4.1.3. Theme 3 Evaluation Strategy

The analysis revealed that evaluation strategies, which involve assessing the effectiveness of learning methods and outcomes, significantly impact foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among participants. Evaluation strategies include reflecting on learning experiences, judging the quality of work, and making necessary adjustments based on these reflections.

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P2 and P3, highlighted the positive impact of evaluation strategies on their enjoyment of learning. P2 explained, *'I regularly reflect on my learning sessions and think about what worked and what didn't. This reflection helps me improve and keeps me motivated.'* P3 shared a similar sentiment, stating, *'Evaluating my progress and the effectiveness of my study techniques helps me stay on track. When I see that my efforts are paying off, it makes learning more enjoyable.'* These quotes illustrate how reflective evaluation enhances motivation and enjoyment by fostering a sense of continuous improvement.

Participants with medium FLE levels, like P4 and P6, had varied experiences with evaluation strategies. P4 noted, *'I try to evaluate my learning methods, but it can be frustrating when I realize something isn't working. However, finding a better approach afterward is satisfying.'* P6 commented, *'I sometimes evaluate my progress, but not consistently. When I do, it helps me understand my strengths and weaknesses, which is useful but can also be discouraging at times.'* These experiences highlight that while evaluation can lead to improved learning strategies, it may also cause frustration if consistent progress is not observed.

Participants with low FLE levels, such as P8 and P9, reported infrequent use of evaluation strategies, contributing to their lower enjoyment levels. P8 admitted, *'I don't really evaluate my learning. I just go through the motions, which makes it hard to know if I'm improving or not.'* P9 echoed this, saying, *'I rarely reflect on my learning process. If I did more often, I might feel more accomplished and enjoy learning more.'* These quotes suggest that a lack of regular evaluation leads to a sense of aimlessness and decreased motivation, negatively affecting enjoyment.

## 4.2. RQ2 What Are the Factors That Influence the Effect of Metacognitive Strategies in Improving the Enjoyment of Foreign Language Learning?

### 4.2.1. Theme 1 Motivation and Attitude

The analysis of the qualitative data reveals that motivation and attitude significantly influence the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing the enjoyment of foreign language learning. Participants' motivation levels and their attitudes towards learning were found to be crucial in determining how beneficial these strategies were in increasing foreign language enjoyment (FLE).

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P1 and P2, demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards learning. P1 shared, *'I'm genuinely interested in learning new languages, and this passion drives me to use different strategies to improve. It's enjoyable because I'm motivated.'* This intrinsic motivation fuels the effective use of metacognitive strategies, making the learning process more enjoyable. Similarly, P2 stated, *'I always have a positive outlook towards learning, which makes me eager to plan and monitor my progress. Seeing my improvement is really satisfying.'* The positive attitude towards learning reinforces the use of metacognitive strategies, enhancing their effectiveness.

Participants with medium FLE levels, such as P4 and P5, exhibited varying degrees of motivation and mixed attitudes towards learning. P4 noted, *'I'm motivated to learn, but sometimes I get frustrated when I don't see quick results. My attitude can shift depending on my progress.'* This fluctuating motivation and attitude impact the consistent use of metacognitive strategies. P5 mentioned, *'I try to stay motivated, but external factors like workload can affect my attitude. When I'm positive and motivated, I find that planning and monitoring my learning make the process more enjoyable.'* This indicates that while motivation and attitude are present, external factors can influence their stability and thus affect the enjoyment derived from metacognitive strategies.

Participants with low FLE levels, such as P7 and P9, often displayed lower intrinsic motivation and more negative attitudes towards learning. P7 confessed, *'I don't feel very motivated to learn, and this makes it hard to stick to any strategies. I just don't enjoy it.'* The lack of intrinsic

motivation and negative attitude hinder the effective use of metacognitive strategies, resulting in lower enjoyment. P9 echoed this sentiment, saying, *'I rarely feel motivated to study, and my attitude towards learning is quite negative. This makes it hard to plan or monitor my progress, and I don't find the process enjoyable at all.'* This illustrates how a lack of motivation and a negative attitude can severely limit the benefits of metacognitive strategies.

P3, with medium proficiency and high FLE, highlighted a key factor: *'My motivation comes from wanting to communicate better with my peers. This goal helps me stay positive and use different strategies effectively.'* This underscores the importance of having clear, personal goals to sustain motivation and positive attitudes. P6, despite a low proficiency level, mentioned, *'I try to stay motivated by reminding myself of the long-term benefits. When I manage to keep a positive attitude, I find that using strategies like planning and monitoring does make learning more enjoyable.'*

#### 4.2.2. Theme 2 Learning Style Preferences

The analysis revealed that learning style preferences significantly influence the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE). Learning style preferences, which include auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and reading or writing styles, determine how learners best absorb and retain information. The interplay between these preferences and metacognitive strategies shapes the overall learning experience.

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P1, P2, and P3, reported that aligning metacognitive strategies with their preferred learning styles greatly enhanced their enjoyment. P1, who has a strong visual preference, stated, *'I use a lot of diagrams and visual aids to organize my thoughts. It makes studying more engaging and enjoyable.'* This shows that visual strategies enhance P1's learning experience. Similarly, P2, who prefers an auditory style, shared, *'I often record myself speaking in the language and play it back. Hearing my progress boosts my confidence and enjoyment.'* This demonstrates that auditory strategies are effective for P2. P3, who enjoys a kinesthetic approach, mentioned, *'I like to use physical activities, like acting out dialogues. It makes learning fun and helps me remember better.'* This highlights the benefit of kinesthetic methods in making learning enjoyable for P3.

Participants with medium FLE levels, like P4 and P5, had mixed experiences depending on how well they could incorporate their learning preferences into their metacognitive strategies. P4, who prefers a reading/writing style, noted, *'I try to take detailed notes and write summaries, which helps to some extent. But I sometimes struggle to keep it interesting.'* This indicates that while the strategies align with P4's preferences, maintaining engagement is challenging. P5, who has a mixed learning style, commented, *'I use a combination of visual and auditory methods. When I can switch between them, I enjoy learning more, but it's not always easy to balance.'* This suggests that flexibility in integrating various strategies enhances enjoyment but can be complex to manage.

Participants with low FLE levels, such as P7, P8, and P9, reported that a mismatch between their learning style preferences and the metacognitive strategies they used contributed to their lower enjoyment. P7, who has a kinesthetic preference, confessed, *'I don't get much chance to use hands-on activities in my studies. It feels monotonous and boring.'* This highlights the negative impact of not being able to use preferred kinesthetic strategies. P8, who leans towards visual learning, mentioned, *'I rarely use visual aids and mostly stick to reading, which I find dull. I think more visuals would make a big difference.'* This suggests that incorporating more visual elements could enhance P8's enjoyment. P9, who prefers an auditory style, said, *'I mostly read and write, but I enjoy listening more. Without auditory practice, I lose interest quickly.'* This indicates that the lack of auditory strategies diminishes P9's engagement and enjoyment.

#### 4.2.3. Theme 3 Instructor Guidance

The analysis revealed that instructor guidance significantly influences the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among participants. Instructor guidance includes providing clear instructions, offering feedback, and modeling effective strategies. The impact of this guidance varies across participants with different levels of FLE.

Participants with high FLE levels, such as P1, P2, and P3, emphasized the crucial role of instructor guidance in their enjoyment of language learning. P1 noted, *'My instructor always gives clear explanations and feedback, which helps me understand what I need to work on. It makes learning more*

*enjoyable because I feel supported.* This indicates that detailed and supportive feedback can significantly enhance the learning experience. Similarly, P2 shared, *'When my teacher models how to use different strategies, it makes it easier for me to apply them. This guidance boosts my confidence and enjoyment.'* This shows that practical demonstrations of metacognitive strategies can increase student engagement and confidence. P3 added, *'Having an instructor who is approachable and willing to answer questions makes a big difference. It makes the learning environment more pleasant and encourages me to keep improving.'* This highlights the importance of an approachable and responsive instructor in fostering a positive learning atmosphere.

Participants with medium FLE levels, such as P4, P5, and P6, had mixed experiences with instructor guidance. P4 stated, *'Sometimes the guidance is helpful, but other times it feels too rigid. Flexibility in teaching methods would enhance my enjoyment.'* This suggests that while guidance is beneficial, it needs to be adaptable to meet varying student needs. P5 commented, *'I appreciate when instructors provide feedback, but I often wish there was more one-on-one time to address my specific needs.'* This indicates a need for more personalized instructor support. P6 noted, *'Instructor guidance is beneficial, but I feel it could be more consistent. When I receive good guidance, I enjoy learning more, but it's not always the case.'* This points to the importance of consistent and reliable instructor guidance to maintain a steady level of enjoyment.

Participants with low FLE levels, reported less effective instructor guidance, which negatively impacted their enjoyment. P7 expressed, *'I often feel lost because the instructions are not clear. This confusion makes learning stressful rather than enjoyable.'* This indicates that unclear instructions can lead to confusion and reduce learning enjoyment. P8 echoed this sentiment, saying, *'The feedback I receive is often too general, and I don't know how to improve. More specific guidance would help me enjoy the process more.'* This highlights the need for detailed and actionable feedback to improve student engagement. P9 added, *'I rarely see my instructor model the strategies. Without this demonstration, it's hard for me to know if I'm using them correctly, which lowers my enjoyment.'* This underscores the importance of instructors demonstrating metacognitive strategies to enhance student understanding and application.

#### 4.2.4. Theme 4 Self-Efficacy

The analysis highlighted that self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations, significantly influences the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE). Participants' levels of self-efficacy affected how they perceived and utilized metacognitive strategies, ultimately impacting their enjoyment of learning a foreign language.

Participants with high FLE levels demonstrated strong self-efficacy, which positively influenced their use of metacognitive strategies. P1 stated, *'I believe I can master new vocabulary and grammar rules, which makes me confident to set and achieve learning goals.'* This high self-efficacy encourages the effective use of planning and monitoring strategies, thereby increasing enjoyment. P2 echoed this sentiment: *'Knowing that I can handle language tasks well boosts my motivation. When I see progress, it's very rewarding.'* Similarly, P3 shared, *'I trust my ability to learn new languages. This belief helps me stay committed to my study plans and enjoy the process.'* These quotes illustrate that high self-efficacy fosters a positive learning experience by enhancing the perceived value and effectiveness of metacognitive strategies.

Participants with medium FLE levels, exhibited moderate self-efficacy, which had a variable impact on their enjoyment. P4 noted, *'I feel capable most of the time, but setbacks can make me doubt myself. When I'm confident, I enjoy using different strategies.'* This fluctuation in self-efficacy affects the consistency and enjoyment of using metacognitive strategies. P5 mentioned, *'I generally believe in my ability to learn, but unexpected difficulties can be discouraging. When I manage to overcome them, it feels great and I enjoy studying more.'* P6 added, *'My confidence varies. On good days, I believe I can succeed and enjoy learning. On bad days, I struggle to see the point in planning or monitoring my progress.'* These responses suggest that strengthening self-efficacy could help stabilize and enhance the enjoyment derived from metacognitive strategies.

Participants with low FLE levels, showed low self-efficacy, which hindered their effective use of metacognitive strategies and diminished their enjoyment of learning. P7 confessed, *'I often doubt my ability to learn a new language, which makes it hard to set goals or follow a plan. It's frustrating and not enjoyable.'* This lack of confidence undermines



the perceived usefulness of metacognitive strategies. P8 commented, *'I don't think I'm good at learning languages, so I don't bother with detailed planning or self-assessment. It just feels like more work.'* P9 shared a similar perspective: *'I rarely feel confident in my language skills, so I don't see the point in using these strategies. It makes learning stressful and unenjoyable.'* These quotes highlight that low self-efficacy can lead to a negative cycle where metacognitive strategies are underutilized, further decreasing learning enjoyment.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the differential impacts of various metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluation—on foreign language enjoyment (FLE), providing valuable insights into how these strategies can be optimized for effective language learning experiences. Planning strategies emerged as critical facilitators of FLE, particularly for participants who reported high enjoyment levels. Clear goals and structured study schedules not only reduced anxiety but also fostered a sense of achievement and progress, aligning with previous research emphasizing the role of planning in enhancing motivation and reducing stress<sup>[23]</sup>. However, participants with medium FLE levels faced challenges in adhering to rigid schedules, suggesting the importance of flexible planning approaches that accommodate individual learning rhythms and preferences<sup>[24]</sup>. For those with low FLE, sporadic use of planning strategies resulted in feelings of overwhelm and stress, underscoring the critical need for structured planning to enhance learning experiences and alleviate negative emotions<sup>[25]</sup>.

Monitoring strategies, involving self-assessment and progress tracking, also played a significant role in influencing FLE. High FLE participants attributed their enjoyment to regular monitoring, which not only kept them engaged but also motivated by providing tangible evidence of their language learning progress. This finding supports existing research highlighting the motivational benefits of self-monitoring in educational contexts<sup>[26]</sup>. Conversely, participants with medium FLE reported mixed results, indicating that consistent and structured monitoring practices are crucial to maximize their positive effects on enjoyment<sup>[27]</sup>. In contrast, low FLE participants reported minimal engagement with monitoring strategies, leading to feelings of disorientation

and reduced motivation, consistent with studies emphasizing the role of regular self-assessment in maintaining learning motivation<sup>[28]</sup>.

Evaluation strategies, involving reflective practices and the assessment of learning effectiveness, emerged as another significant factor influencing FLE. High FLE participants found that reflective evaluation enhanced their enjoyment by fostering a sense of continuous improvement and accomplishment in their language learning journey. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing the benefits of reflective practice in enhancing learning satisfaction and professional competence<sup>[29]</sup>. Medium FLE participants recognized the utility of evaluation strategies for identifying strengths and weaknesses, yet inconsistent evaluation practices occasionally led to frustration, reinforcing the importance of balanced and regular assessment for sustained motivation<sup>[30]</sup>. Conversely, low FLE participants reported infrequent use of evaluation practices, resulting in a lack of direction and decreased motivation, highlighting the necessity of structured reflective evaluation to enhance learning enjoyment and engagement<sup>[31]</sup>.

Moreover, the study identified several contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in enhancing FLE. Motivation and attitude emerged as crucial determinants, with high FLE participants demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the pivotal role of motivation in fostering enjoyable and successful language learning experiences<sup>[32, 33]</sup>. Conversely, participants with low FLE often lacked intrinsic motivation and displayed negative attitudes, hindering their effective use of metacognitive strategies, consistent with prior findings on the impact of motivation on learning outcomes<sup>[34]</sup>.

Additionally, the study highlighted the influence of learning style preferences on the enjoyment derived from metacognitive strategies. Participants reported that aligning these strategies with their preferred learning styles significantly enhanced engagement and enjoyment. This finding underscores the importance of personalized learning approaches tailored to individual preferences to optimize learning experiences<sup>[35]</sup>. Conversely, mismatches between learning style preferences and metacognitive strategies led to lower enjoyment, emphasizing the need for educators to consider and integrate diverse learning styles into instructional

practices<sup>[36]</sup>.

Furthermore, instructor guidance emerged as a critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies. Participants valued clear instructions, constructive feedback, and modeling from instructors, which significantly contributed to their learning enjoyment and motivation. This finding aligns with prior research highlighting the pivotal role of supportive teaching practices in fostering positive learning environments and student satisfaction<sup>[37]</sup>. Conversely, inadequate instructor guidance detracted from enjoyment and engagement, underscoring the importance of effective pedagogical support in optimizing learning experiences<sup>[34]</sup>.

Lastly, the study emphasized the role of self-efficacy beliefs in shaping the use and enjoyment of metacognitive strategies. Participants with high self-efficacy reported greater enjoyment and engagement in language learning, driven by their confidence in achieving learning goals through effective planning and monitoring. This finding supports existing literature highlighting the significant influence of self-efficacy beliefs on learning outcomes and motivation<sup>[24, 38]</sup>. Conversely, participants with low self-efficacy struggled to effectively engage with metacognitive strategies, aligning with research demonstrating the detrimental effects of low self-efficacy on learning performance and motivation<sup>[26, 39]</sup>.

The findings of this study have several significant implications for the field of language education and the problem of enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) through metacognitive strategies. The study highlights the value of planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies in fostering FLE. Educators can incorporate metacognitive strategy training into language curricula to help learners better regulate their learning processes, reduce anxiety, and enhance enjoyment. Structured training programs can enable students to set clear goals, track progress, and reflect effectively on their learning outcomes. The research underscores the importance of aligning metacognitive strategies with learners' individual preferences, such as learning styles and motivation levels. Tailoring strategies to suit diverse learners can lead to greater engagement and satisfaction, addressing the gap in one-size-fits-all approaches to language instruction. The findings demonstrate that self-efficacy and instructor guidance play pivotal roles in enhancing the effectiveness of metacognitive

strategies. Educators should prioritize fostering supportive classroom environments, providing constructive feedback, and modeling effective strategy use to build learners' confidence and enjoyment. This study bridges the gap between cognitive and emotional dimensions in language learning, showing how metacognitive strategies can positively influence learners' emotional experiences. This integrated perspective can inform future research and pedagogical practices that seek to create holistic and balanced language learning environments. By promoting metacognitive awareness and enjoyment, this study supports sustained motivation and improved language proficiency. These outcomes align with broader educational goals of fostering lifelong learning and adaptability in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

## 6. Conclusions

The article illuminates the nuanced roles that planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies play in enhancing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among learners. High FLE participants consistently highlighted the positive impact of clear goals, structured schedules, regular self-assessment, and reflective evaluation on their learning experiences, reinforcing the importance of these metacognitive strategies in fostering motivation, reducing anxiety, and promoting a sense of accomplishment. However, the study also underscores the need for flexibility and personalization in the application of metacognitive strategies. Medium and low FLE participants faced challenges with rigid planning and inconsistent monitoring and evaluation, suggesting that tailored approaches that align with individual learning styles and preferences are crucial for maximizing the benefits of these strategies. Moreover, the significant role of instructor guidance and self-efficacy in shaping the effectiveness and enjoyment of metacognitive strategies highlights the importance of supportive educational environments and fostering learners' confidence in their capabilities.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the interplay between metacognitive strategies and FLE, suggesting that a holistic approach—one that considers individual differences, provides flexibility, and emphasizes supportive instructional practices—can significantly enhance foreign language learning experiences. These findings offer practical implications for educators aiming to cultivate enjoyable and

effective language learning environments, emphasizing the need to integrate metacognitive strategies thoughtfully and adaptively to meet diverse learner needs.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Q.L.; methodology, Q.L.; software, Q.L.; validation, B.S.A., A.H.A.H.; formal analysis, Q.L.; investigation, Q.L.; resources, Q.L.; data curation, Q.L.; writing—original draft preparation, Q.L.; writing—review and editing, Q.L.; visualization, Q.L.; supervision, B.S.A., A.H.A.H.; project administration, Q.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of DONGGUAN CITY UNIVERCITY (protocol code: 523419 and date of approval: 2024-11-01).

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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