

# A Study of Students' Metacognitive Beliefs About Foreign Language Study and Their Impact on Learning

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**Abstract:** *This article reports on an investigation into the language learning beliefs of students of French in England, aged 16 to 18. It focuses on qualitative data from two groups of learners (10 in total). While both groups had broadly similar levels of achievement in French in terms of examination success, they differed greatly in the self-image they had of themselves as language learners, with one group displaying low levels of self-efficacy beliefs regarding the possibility of future success. The implications of such beliefs for students' levels of motivation and persistence are discussed, together with their possible causes. The article concludes by suggesting changes in classroom practice that might help students develop a more positive image of themselves as language learners.*

**Key words:** *attributions, learner strategies, metacognitive beliefs, motivation, self-efficacy*

**Language:** *French*

## Introduction

Numerous studies have sought to uncover what distinguishes more effective learners from less effective ones, from the 1970s and the "Good Language Learner" study by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Tödesco (1978) onwards. This search has resulted in a continuing interest in two key areas. The first is an interest in learner strategies, in the "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Research over the last 10 to 15 years has increasingly shown that in terms of strategy use, in all language skills, it is the use of metacognitive strategies that characterizes the 'good language learner' (Graham, 1997; Macaro, 2001)—strategies that are "higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, pp. 44–45).

Furthermore, it has been argued that effective metacognitive strategy use is in its turn dependent on learners' metacognitive knowledge or beliefs (Vandergrift,

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