

Research Proposal: The Impact of Teachers' Linguistic Framing on Students' "Study Crafting" in AI-Integrated Learning Environments: A Regulatory Focus Theory Perspective

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1. Abstract

This study explores how teachers' linguistic framing shapes students' proactive learning behaviour—conceptualised as Study Crafting—through the mediating mechanism of students' Regulatory Focus (promotion vs. prevention orientation). Building on the foundations of Job Crafting and Regulatory Focus Theory, the research extends proactive behaviour frameworks from organisational settings to higher education. The study further incorporates AI-integrated learning contexts as a modern pedagogical environment that influences students' motivation and resource crafting.

Using a mixed-methods design, the project will proceed through four phases: (1) concept development and qualitative dimension building of Study Crafting, (2) questionnaire design and validation, (3) large-scale quantitative testing via SEM, and (4) interpretation of theoretical and pedagogical implications. The expected outcomes include a validated Study Crafting Scale, an empirically supported model linking teacher discourse, motivational focus, and proactive learning, and an applied Study Crafting Toolkit to inform teacher training in AI-era pedagogy.

2. Introduction and Rationale

Proactive engagement and learner autonomy are core goals of contemporary higher education. However, most existing research on learner motivation focuses on self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2000) or learning strategies (Oxford, 2017), which emphasise internal cognitive control but overlook students' active reconstruction of their learning environments, relationships, and resources. Inspired by organisational psychology, this project adapts the Job Crafting concept to the educational domain, proposing **Study Crafting** as a learner-driven process of reshaping learning tasks, resources, and relationships to enhance engagement and outcomes. In AI-integrated classrooms, such crafting behaviours may include reconfiguring study tasks using digital tools, co-creating assessment formats, and renegotiating learning meaning and identity.

Meanwhile, teachers' **linguistic framing**—how they present tasks, feedback, and expectations through promotion- or prevention-oriented language—can activate distinct motivational systems in students. According to Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997; Lockwood et al., 2002), a promotion focus

drives exploration and growth, whereas a prevention focus emphasises security and obligation. Understanding how such linguistic signals affect students' motivation and study crafting is vital for effective pedagogy in the AI era.

This research addresses three interrelated questions that are central to understanding learner proactivity in AI-integrated higher education. First, it examines how the concept of Study Crafting can be theoretically conceptualised and empirically operationalised within contemporary learning environments shaped by digital and AI technologies. Second, it investigates how teachers' linguistic framing influences students' engagement in Study Crafting through underlying regulatory focus mechanisms, with particular attention to the motivational processes activated by pedagogical language. Finally, the study considers how insights derived from these relationships can inform the design of pedagogical language practices and AI-integrated teaching approaches that support learner autonomy, agency, and meaningful engagement.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Study Crafting: From Work to Learning

Job Crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims et al., 2012) describes how employees proactively modify their tasks, relationships, and cognitive interpretations in order to align their work with personal meaning and values. Transferring this concept to educational contexts, Study Crafting is conceptualised as students' proactive adjustment and reconstruction of learning tasks, resources, relationships, assessment practices, and meaning-making processes to enhance engagement, autonomy, and academic performance. Drawing on qualitative insights and theoretical synthesis, Study Crafting is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing students' active redefinition of learning goals, sequencing, and methods; the strategic integration of human and AI-supported resources; the reshaping of relational networks with peers and teachers; the co-negotiation of assessment formats and criteria; the reinterpretation of learning meaning and learner identity; and the adjustment of learning time, environment, and modality in response to contextual demands.

3.2 Teachers' Linguistic Framing

Informed by Linguistic Framing Theory (Fairhurst, 2011; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), teachers' discourse can be understood as a psychological cue that shapes how students interpret learning opportunities, expectations, and potential risks within educational contexts. Pedagogical language does not merely transmit instructional content but actively frames the motivational meaning of learning activities. Within this framework, three primary orientations of teacher linguistic framing can be distinguished: promotion-framed language, which emphasises growth, exploration, and the pursuit of ideal selves; prevention-framed language, which foregrounds responsibility, compliance, and the

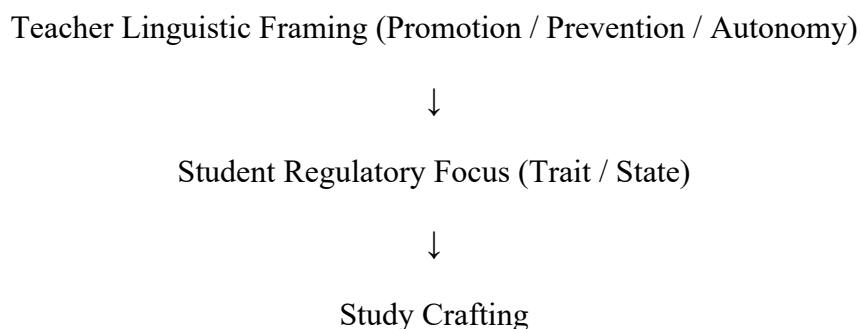
avoidance of errors or negative outcomes; and autonomy-supportive language, which offers learners meaningful choices and multiple pathways for task completion, thereby supporting a sense of agency and self-direction.

3.3 Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT)

According to RFT (Higgins, 1997, 2000), individuals pursue goals through promotion (approach gains) or prevention (avoid losses) motivational systems. In classroom contexts (e.g., Molden et al., 2008), teachers' language can activate students' **state regulatory focus**, aligning with or diverging from their **trait regulatory focus**. When linguistic cues and students' motivational orientations align (e.g., promotion–promotion fit), motivation and engagement are enhanced—a phenomenon known as **regulatory fit** (Cesario et al., 2004).

3.4 Theoretical Model

This study integrates linguistic, motivational, and behavioural theories to propose a **psychological channel model**:



AI integration is conceptualised as a **contextual enhancer** that expands resource crafting opportunities and moderates the teacher–student motivational link.

3.5 Hypotheses

H1a: Promotion-framed teacher language positively predicts students' promotion-focused motivation.

H1b: Prevention-framed teacher language positively predicts students' prevention-focused motivation.

H1c: Autonomy-supportive language enhances students' promotion focus.

H2a: Promotion focus positively predicts Study Crafting (especially task, resource/AI, and meaning crafting).

H2b: Prevention focus predicts assessment and temporal crafting.

H3: Student regulatory focus mediates the relationship between teacher linguistic framing and Study Crafting.

H4: The effects of teacher linguistic framing on Study Crafting are stronger in AI-integrated learning environments.

H5: Trait regulatory focus moderates the effect of teacher language on state regulatory focus (fit effect).

3.6 Literature Review / Rationale

While learner autonomy and self-regulated learning have long been central concerns in English Language Education, particularly in TESOL and EAP contexts, existing frameworks tend to conceptualise learners primarily as managers of internal cognitive and metacognitive processes (Zimmerman, 2000; Oxford, 2017). Such approaches foreground strategy use, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, yet often underplay the socially situated and discursively mediated nature of learning in higher education settings.

In contrast, the concept of Study Crafting foregrounds learners' proactive engagement with their learning environment as a whole, including tasks, relationships, resources, and meaning-making processes. From an applied linguistics perspective, this shift is particularly significant because learning environments in TESOL, EAP, and EMI contexts are fundamentally constituted through language: task instructions, assessment criteria, feedback, and institutional discourse. Learners' opportunities to act autonomously are therefore not only shaped by individual motivation but also by how pedagogical language frames what is possible, desirable, or risky within academic study.

By integrating teachers' linguistic framing into the analysis of learner proactivity, this project responds directly to the module's concern with how language operates within educational contexts, tasks, and participant roles. It extends existing discussions of learner autonomy by highlighting the interactional and discursive conditions under which autonomy and agency are activated or constrained. This perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary higher education, where AI-integrated learning environments further expand learners' capacity to reconfigure resources and practices, while simultaneously intensifying the importance of pedagogical language in guiding ethical, effective, and meaningful engagement.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A sequential mixed-methods design will be adopted:

Phase	Focus	Method
1. Concept Development	Define Study Crafting	Literature synthesis & expert validation

2. Qualitative Study	Build dimensions of Study Crafting & teacher discourse	Classroom observation, focus groups, interviews
3. Questionnaire Development	Develop & validate scales	Item generation, pilot test (n≈150), EFA/CFA
4. Quantitative Testing	Test model & hypotheses	Survey (n≥400), SEM/PLS-SEM analysis

4.6 Methodological Rationale and Feasibility for a Small-Scale Study

The methodological design of this project is intentionally aligned with the principles of small-scale practitioner research in English Language Education. Rather than prioritising experimental control, the study adopts classroom observation and semi-structured interviews as its primary qualitative methods in order to capture naturally occurring pedagogical language and learners' situated responses to it. In EFL, EAP, and EMI contexts, teaching and learning are highly interactional and context-sensitive; observational and interview-based data therefore provide richer insight into how linguistic framing operates in practice than decontextualised experimental tasks.

The use of a questionnaire is positioned as an exploratory and pilot-oriented component of the study, designed to identify emerging patterns between teachers' linguistic framing, students' regulatory focus, and study crafting behaviours. At this stage, the survey does not aim to produce statistically generalisable claims but rather to inform construct development and refine measurement instruments for potential future research. This mixed-methods approach allows qualitative findings to guide the interpretation of quantitative trends, ensuring methodological coherence within a small-scale design.

It is acknowledged that the limited sample size and context-specific settings may constrain the generalisability of the findings. However, such limitations are consistent with the aims of practitioner research, which prioritises contextualised understanding, pedagogical relevance, and theoretical sensitivity over broad representativeness. By foregrounding feasibility and depth of analysis, the proposed methods are well suited to the scope and objectives of this investigation.

4.2 Sampling

Participants will include undergraduate and taught postgraduate students from multiple UK universities, representing varied disciplines and both domestic and international cohorts. Maximum variation sampling will be applied for the qualitative phase; stratified sampling for quantitative validation.

4.3 Instruments

A range of instruments will be employed to capture the key constructs in this study. Teachers' linguistic framing will be measured using the Teacher Linguistic Framing Scale (TLFS), which is adapted from Ren's (2019) Leader Linguistic Framing Scale and comprises promotion-, prevention-,

and autonomy-oriented dimensions tailored to educational contexts. Students' motivational orientation will be assessed using an adapted version of the Regulatory Focus Scale developed by Lockwood et al. (2002), incorporating both trait and state measures to reflect relatively stable tendencies as well as context-sensitive motivational activation. Study Crafting will be measured through a newly developed multidimensional scale encompassing six dimensions, with its construct validity examined through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA/CFA). In addition, several control variables—including gender, year of study, academic discipline, familiarity with AI tools, and nationality—will be included to account for potential background influences on students' learning behaviours.

4.4 Data Collection

Data will be collected through a sequential mixed-methods design comprising qualitative and quantitative phases. In the qualitative phase, classroom observations will be conducted in a small number of teaching contexts, with selected sessions transcribed for discourse-oriented analysis. These observations will be complemented by several focus groups involving students and a series of semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students, enabling the exploration of participants' interpretations of pedagogical language and learning practices. Qualitative data will be analysed thematically with the support of NVivo in order to identify recurring patterns and analytically relevant themes.

The quantitative phase will involve the administration of an online questionnaire distributed via Qualtrics. Survey data may be collected across two or three waves to capture relationships between teachers' linguistic framing, students' regulatory focus, and study crafting behaviours over time. While larger samples are desirable for model testing, within the scope of this study the survey is positioned as an exploratory component intended to support construct development and pattern identification rather than statistical generalisation.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this project is guided primarily by the research questions rather than by a purely technique-driven logic. Qualitative data generated from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews will be analysed thematically through an iterative process of familiarisation, initial coding, and theme development. Coding will focus on identifying recurring patterns in teachers' pedagogical language—such as promotion-framed, prevention-framed, and autonomy-supportive expressions—as well as in students' reported responses, including shifts in motivation, engagement, and study practices. Themes will be refined through constant comparison to ensure internal coherence and analytical transparency.

This qualitative analysis is intended to address the first research question by clarifying how Study Crafting manifests in AI-integrated English language learning contexts and how learners interpret

teachers’ linguistic cues in practice. Quantitative analysis of questionnaire data will then be used in an exploratory manner to examine relationships between key constructs. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA/CFA) will be employed to examine the factor structure of the Study Crafting scale, alongside standard reliability and validity checks. Where appropriate, exploratory modelling techniques may be used to examine potential mediation and moderation patterns, while recognising that statistical findings are indicative rather than confirmatory within the scope of a small-scale study. Overall, quantitative analysis serves a supportive role, enabling triangulation with qualitative findings and helping to identify patterns that warrant further investigation, while prioritising interpretive depth, coherence, and pedagogical relevance over technical complexity.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study are informed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines and by the specific dynamics of teacher–student relationships in higher education. Given the potential power imbalance between teachers and students, particular care will be taken to ensure that participation is fully voluntary and that no participant feels pressured to take part due to assessment, authority, or institutional expectations. Where possible, data collection will be scheduled independently of formal teaching and assessment activities to minimise any perceived obligation.

Formal ethical approval will be sought from the University Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection. All participants will receive detailed informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, assurances of anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Audio recordings and written data will be anonymised, stored securely in accordance with institutional data protection requirements, and used solely for academic research purposes.

In relation to AI-integrated learning contexts, transparency will be prioritised throughout the research process. Participants will be informed about the nature of any AI-related discussions and reassured that the use or non-use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT or Grammarly, will not affect their academic standing or assessment outcomes. All AI-related procedures will comply with institutional policies on academic integrity and ethical research practice.

6. Expected Outcomes and Contributions

Type	Contribution
Theoretical	Develops and validates the Study Crafting construct; extends Regulatory Focus Theory to educational linguistics; establishes a mediating mechanism linking teacher language and proactive learning.

Methodological	Produces a psychometrically validated Study Crafting Scale; integrates linguistic, motivational, and behavioural constructs within an SEM framework.
Practical	Provides teacher language guidelines and a Study Crafting Toolkit for AI-integrated pedagogy; supports the UK TEF and Graduate Attributes agenda.
Policy Alignment	Supports OfS and TEF emphasis on student engagement, independent learning, and digital literacy; contributes to AI ethics and pedagogy discourse.

7. Timeline

Period	Activity
Months 1–3	Literature review and theoretical model refinement
Months 4–8	Qualitative data collection and thematic analysis
Months 9–12	Scale development and pilot testing
Months 13–18	Large-scale quantitative survey
Months 19–22	Data analysis and model validation
Months 23–26	Toolkit design and dissemination plan
Months 27–30	Thesis writing, journal submission, conference presentation

8. Key References

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