THE EMPLOYMENT OF SELF-REGULATED READING STRATEGIES BY ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

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Reading comprehension is a crucial component of academic life, especially for students majoring in English. However, EFL students face various challenges in their learning, including, for example, the interpretation of reading materials and a lack of motivation. In this respect, students could utilize self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies to increase their learning autonomy and motivation, which are believed to contribute to academic success. Given that Vietnamese EFL learners also apply SRL strategies, this study aims to investigate the degree to which English majors employ SRL strategies in reading. The study also attempts to examine the most and least frequently used strategies and the differences, if any, between the two genders regarding SRL strategy use. 130 English-majored students from a university in the Mekong Delta were involved in the study. The quantitative data were gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire adapted from Duong and Ta (2022), and a follow-up interview for qualitative data was conducted with five students randomly chosen from the participants. The findings revealed that students generally employed SRL strategies to enhance reading comprehension, with different levels across the eight subcategories of strategy. In addition, a statistical test showed no significant difference between the male and female students regarding their implementation of SRL strategies. These results suggest pedagogical implications for teachers and learners, emphasizing the importance of SRL strategies in developing reading skills. Thus, teachers are expected to raise students' awareness and practical employment of SRL to achieve their academic goals.

Keywords: EFL Vietnamese students; reading comprehension; self-regulated learning strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language (L2) is a long and complex process. To be successful in L2 learning, one has to possess and develop many qualities, and many language aspects and skills require significant effort to practice continuously. Reading can be considered a challenging receptive skill among the basic skills needed for communication. Rahmah and Mistar (2023) stated, "Reading is a complicated activity that involves multiple functions of the eye, voice, and brain, such as perceiving, detecting, vocalizing, comprehending, and creating in

the brain" (p. 47). Therefore, learners of English as a foreign language should try to gain reading abilities and reading comprehension is a crucial skill. The authors also point out that, "Reading comprehension abilities play a significant role in deciding a student's academic success or failure" (p. 48). Reading comprehension helps students enhance their understanding of the meaning of a whole reading text, but this is not easy to achieve and entails several challenges. Khasawneh and Al-Rub (2020) claim that "It is an activity requiring accuracy, autonomy while reading, deep understanding, comprehension speed, enjoying reading, the variation in reading purposes, being involved with the different events, giving opinions, being critical, and being creative" (p. 5335). As a result, students should strive to foster reading comprehension and cultivate reading as a hobby. In second language learning and teaching research, besides attempts that have been made to upgrade and ameliorate reading motivation through extensive reading and reading clubs, delving into learning strategies is also a worthwhile research focus.

On the one hand, specific techniques and strategies employed in particular reading tasks or tests are instantly helpful at a micro-level. However, for long-term objectives and lifelong learning, education and L2 learning and teaching are expected to go beyond these practical skills. In other words, students should be guided to learn to be autonomous and self-regulated learners. They are supposed to take responsibility for their academic pursuit, maintain their motivation, monitor their learning process, and evaluate and plan the next steps in their learning. A capacity to carry out all the actions aforementioned is attributed to self-regulation, which is a pivotal learner quality. Based on the assumption that the more self-regulated a person is, the more successful and effective reader he or she becomes, this study leans on the literature on self-regulation theory but limits its scope to investigate learners' employment of self-regulated learning strategies in reading in the EFL context of Can Tho University in the Mekong River region in Vietnam. Thus, SRL issues, such as overall SRL competences, less and more used SRL strategies, gender-specific strategies, etc., are worth investigating. It is expected that understanding self-regulated learning strategies in reading will help students increase their reading comprehension and render the learning process more enjoyable. On the teachers' side, while understanding SRL is generally helpful, understanding learners' reading-specific strategies would help tailor their instructions to facilitate the development of this challenging skill.

To achieve such objectives, the study sought answers to the following three research questions.

1. To what extent do English majors employ self-regulated learning strategies in learning to read?

2. What specific strategies are employed the most and the least frequently?

3. Are there any differences between male and female students regarding their self-regulated reading learning strategies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Self-regulated learning and self-regulated learning strategies

Emerging from the development of psychological study since the beginning of the 20th century and a shift in perspectives toward learner differences in the 1980s, self-regulated learning (SRL) has been a topic of interest and academic research (Zimmerman, 2002). There are many definitions of SRL, and Zimmerman (1990) admits that "Until recently, there has been very little empirical evidence regarding how students become masters of their learning, a topic that has become known as self-regulated learning" (p. 4). The author also highlights the divergence in SRL definitions mainly because different researchers have their own theoretical orientations and conceptualizations of this aptitude.

However, in defining SRL, most scholars have reached a consensus that this learner variable is reflected in learner metacognition, strategic action (or behavior), and motivation. It is worth noticing that in a process-driven view on learning, SRL is believed to manifest many concrete processes, for example, "goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluation, self-attributions, seeking help or information, and important self-motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy and intrinsic task interest" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 64). Given the strength of SRL being well established in education, the development of this aptitude has been one of the responsibilities of educators and an ultimate target in academic programs. The following section discusses: (1) the dimensions of SRL and (2) the specific strategies needed to attain SRL and become a self-regulated learner.

Regarding cognition, SRL strategies are those related to the content and nature of a specific discipline. Common cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills, are also important. According to Shuy (2010), these skills can be acquired through classroom instructions and activities that involve learners in identifying and reflecting on relevant information, comparing it with their prior knowledge, etc. Comprehension and creativity tasks such as generating questions, visualizing real-world situations, debating arguments, and writing persuasive essays are also thought to fit into the cognitive dimension of SRL (Shuy, 2010).

As for the metacognitive dimension, authors, including Shuy (2010), put forward the idea of SRL consisting of three types of knowledge. In Shuy's explanation, declarative knowledge refers to what learners know about themselves and how it influences their performance. Procedural knowledge is related to learners' use of strategies and procedures. The third type is labeled as conditional knowledge, which explains why and when a particular strategy is used. Shuy (2010) argues that adult learners must articulate prior knowledge of a new situation. Therefore,, it is essential to realize this kind of knowledge and make the strategies "visible" and "automated" (Shuy, 2010, p. 2). She further suggests having demonstrations and debriefings after demonstrations as measures to enhance SRL. To a large extent, such recommendations align with the multi-phased model of doing tasks in task-based language learning.

The motivational aspects of SRL are revealed through self-efficacy, beliefs, and expectations of learners. Adult learners are thought to experience difficulties and challenges in their learning occasionally. Therefore, building self-regulated strategies such as setting goals, monitoring, and displaying progress can help learners have a positive sense of self as effective learners (Shuy, 2010). Zumbrunn et al. (2011) reviewed the literature by various prominent researchers and synthesized a list of processes related to self-regulated learning strategies that are helpful for teachers in their attempts to promote this aptitude for their students. These processes are presented in detail as follows.

2.1.1 Goal setting

Goal setting is regarded as a standard and an integral element in SRL (Schunk, 2001; Winne & Hadwin, 1998; Wolters, 1998). In language learning, goals can be perceived as short-term or long-term ones. Zumbrunn et al. (2011) state that short-term goals can be understanding a topic or getting good scores on a test. Other authors agree that attaining short-term goals and keeping track of progress are important and helpful as aspirations for long-term aims. An appropriate and effective implementation of the goal-setting strategy can have the potential to positively influence students' learning in the long term (Tran & Phan Tran, 2021).

2.1.2 Planning

As important as goal setting, planning is the next SRL strategy to mention (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995; Schunk, 2001; Scheid, 1993). This strategy is often considered to involve three specific tasks: establishing objectives, identifying corresponding activities to achieve the objectives, and determining a plan regarding the time and resources needed to accomplish. Again, tracking the learning progress and maintaining a sense of organization are highlighted during the planning phases (Nguyen, 2011; Zimmerman, 2004).

2.1.3 Self-motivation

An ability to self-motivate in learning is believed to be advantageous. According to Corno (1993), this ability is needed for learners to have control over their learning. As external rewards or incentives are not always available (Zimmerman, 2004), but learning difficulties and challenges are usually abundant, students are supposed to develop a kind of motivation from within (Wolters, 2003). Self-motivation is, therefore, substantially contributing to making students more autonomous learners.

2.1.4 Attention control

As for attention control, Winne (1995) draws attention to two important strategies. First, the learners can concentrate on what is relevant to the task or activity they are doing. By focusing on their work and being selective, they can, at the same time, ignore the distractions around them. Secondly, it is crucial to set up a suitable environment conducive to learning (Winne, 1995). Working in a quiet place or having frequent breaks is recommended to build sufficient concentration.

2.1.5 Flexible use of strategies

There is a wide range of task types in the learning environment. Therefore, appropriate strategies should be chosen for specific tasks, and each learner should explore their learning style and strategies. Flexibility in strategies is recommended and needs to be developed for students. Winne (1995) suggests that teachers can help students become flexible users of strategies by modeling new strategies and, at the same time, providing sufficient scaffolding and practice with them.

2.1.6 Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to several strategies, generally making students become more responsible, strategic, and autonomous learners. In Kistner et al.'s (2010) words, students take ownership of the learning process and achievement outcomes. Self-monitoring is the strategy involving all the strategies discussed earlier, such as setting goals and planning, self-motivating, being strategically flexible, and so on. To achieve this, learners are encouraged to keep records of their time investment and strategy employment. By doing

these tracking tasks, students are informed about their learning progress so that they can make any necessary changes and adjustments in their learning.

2.1.7 Help-seeking

Butler (1998) noted that self-regulated learning does not exclude support and assistance from outside, nor does each student necessarily accomplish their task independently. It is important to seek advice from others, but still stay abreast of being autonomous (Ryan et al., 2001). Continuous feedback from the teachers and peers is necessary. Group and pair work are recommended, and teachers are thought to act as a reliable resource for students to consult.

2.1.8 Self-evaluation

Another important strategy of self-regulated learners is the ability to evaluate their learning. It is necessary for them to plan and monitor their performance in successive tasks in the future (Winne & Hadwin, 1998). Teachers can provide guidance and support initially and gradually increase learners' independence in terms of assessment.

2.2 Measuring SRL strategies

Various methods have been used to approach and measure self-regulated learning. The two inventories developed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) were among the most widely used in SRL research. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed a comprehensive tool to assess language learning strategies and self-regulated learning among learners. Established to enhance understanding of the cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in language acquisition, this inventory categorized strategies into three main types: metacognitive, cognitive, and social and affective. By providing insights into how learners manage their learning processes, this inventory enabled educators and researchers to identify effective learning patterns and tailor instruction accordingly. Its focus on self-regulated learning highlighted the importance of learner autonomy and motivation, making it a valuable resource for promoting effective language education and fostering independent learning skills.

On the other hand, Oxford's (1990) inventory is also a prominent tool designed to measure language learning strategies and self-regulated learning. Developed by Patricia Oxford, this comprehensive inventory provided insights into learners' cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies as they navigate the complexities of acquiring a new language. By assessing various strategic dimensions, the inventory highlighted individual learning preferences and encouraged learners to reflect on their self-regulatory processes. This dual focus on language learning strategies and self-regulation makes the inventory by Oxford an invaluable resource for educators and researchers interested in understanding how learners manage their education and optimize their language acquisition process. As a result, it promotes more effective teaching methodologies and enhances learners' overall engagement and achievement in language learning.

2.3 Aligning self-regulated learning strategies with L2 reading

In L2 studying, SRL has been found to facilitate acquisition and success (Ching, 2002; Dornyei & Ryan, 2015; Nguyen & Tran, 2021). Many studies have been conducted to investigate the role of SRL in the development of specific skills, such as those by Tran and Duong (2013) and Tran and Nguyen (2020). The following section reviews recent studies on SRL strategies used in L2 learning contexts in Vietnam and worldwide. It is worth mentioning that very little research focusing on SRL strategy employment in reading has been found in the literature.

Tran and Nguyen (2020) researched the extent to which first-year English majors (N = 100) used SRL strategies in their studying. Through responses to a questionnaire, this study found that these students did use the relevant strategies, albeit at a moderate level. In addition, the students used strategies more often for specific purposes, namely keeping and monitoring records of their learning progress, and less often for others.

The study by Tran et al. (2023) focused on high school students' levels of self-efficacy and self-regulated language learning strategies and the relationship between the two variables. This quantitative study involved 240 students. Various results and findings were reported and discussed. However, in the interest of SRL strategy use, it was found that the high school students in the study employed a wide range of strategies and used them at a relatively high frequency level.

Duong and Nguyen Dang (2021) studied the relationship between SRL strategies and learner autonomy. The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data based on a questionnaire administered to 130 university students and answers in interviews with ten of them. The study found that the students acknowledged the role of learner autonomy, and in terms of SRL, the students could use different types of strategies for their learning purposes.

Tran and Phan Tran (2021) explored students using SRL strategies in a project-based language instruction mode. This study involved 147 high school students, and the results showed that SRL strategies

were used in project-based learning with various degrees of frequency. The highest frequency was associated with the category 'flexible use of strategies. Common strategies also included those belonging to 'planning', 'attention control', 'self-monitoring', and 'goal setting'. Self-motivation and self-evaluation were the two categories rated as less frequently used. It is interesting to note that this strategy use pattern is similar across the students' academic levels.

A similar study by Duong and Ta (2022) was conducted in the high school context of Vietnam. Ninety students responded to a questionnaire asking about their use of SRL strategies. The students rated the frequency of using the eight groups of SRL strategies, namely goal setting, planning, self-motivation, flexible use of learning strategies, attention control, self-monitoring, help-seeking, and self-evaluation during their English learning. Goal-setting strategies were the most frequently used, while self-evaluation strategies were among the least used.

Sutiono et al. (2022) examined how self-regulated Indonesian students progressed in their reading. This study involved 40 university students in their second and fourth semesters. The authors found that these two groups of students share similarities in all three dimensions of SRL: their cognitive processes, motivation, and behavior in this particular context. A slight difference was that the fourth-semester students were found to be more organized SRL students than the second-semester ones.

Griffiths and Cansiz (2015) attempted to provide an overview of language learning strategies used by successful learners. This qualitative research, employing responses from interviews with 16 teachers as experienced learners, found that language learning success was highly associated with a wide range of strategy employment. The authors recommended frequent practice with a personalized repertoire of strategies that meet individuals' needs and goals while attaining specific situational expectations.

Ali and Paramasivam (2016) studied the language learning strategies among pre-university students in Kurdistan. They found that while the Kurdish EFL learners preferred metacognitive and social strategies, they slighted the role of effective strategies. Overall, the students used learning strategies at a medium level. This study confirmed a general tendency suggested in language learning strategy literature, arguing that more advanced learners would employ more strategies.

Generally, the review of the current literature reveals that understandings and findings related to self-regulated learning vary widely across contexts. Thus, there is a need to study SRL among EFL students, especially in the context of Vietnamese classrooms in the Mekong Delta. The findings of this study are expected to shed more light on the interest and attempts to enhance learners' motivation and autonomy, part of which self-regulated learning played an essential role.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate students' employment of self-regulated learning strategies in reading. The quantitative component was a questionnaire deemed to be generic, with numerical data useful for gathering individuals' perceptions of their practice (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Semi-structured interviews were performed using a self-designed set of questions to gather qualitative information. Adopting mixed methods provided sufficient data to answer the three research questions in the introduction regarding participants' use of SRL strategies in reading, the most and least frequently used strategies, and the differences in practice by the two genders. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the English majors at a university in the Mekong Delta. The interviews were arranged and conducted two weeks later, contributing to a further understanding of how students used self-regulated learning strategies in reading comprehension. The quantitative data were processed by the statistical software SPSS version 22, and participants' interview responses were analyzed using content analysis methods to supplement and reinforce the information from the questionnaire. This design was appropriate to gain a cross-sectional richness of information sufficient to achieve the study's objectives.

3.2 Participants

The study's participants were 130 students majoring in English Studies at Can Tho University, Vietnam. They were conveniently chosen from over 1,000 students in various programs at the School of Foreign Languages. Among the participants, five students (two males and three females) were randomly chosen for the interview sessions to get insights into the self-regulated learning strategies they usually employed in their reading assignments. This selection of participants was appropriate because most had attended reading comprehension courses when this study was conducted. So, they were thought to have enough reading experience to reflect on their practice and answer the questions in the questionnaire.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22. Of the 130 participants, 99 were female students, accounting for 76% of the study sample, and the remaining 31 were male, accounting for 24%. The imbalance in the male-female ratio was noticeable. Nevertheless, this did not affect the computation since statistics were based on percentages, not raw numbers.

Table 1: Participants' gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	31	24%
Female	99	76%

In terms of duration at university, the largest proportion of participants were sophomores, with 70 students, accounting for 54%. Freshman and junior students are 16 and 12, respectively. The remaining participant sample was 32 senior students, accounting for 25%. The inclusion of the participants was based on convenience, but the sample reflected a wide range of English majors in terms of their years of experience at university. Tables 1 and 2 gave general information about the study participants.

Table 2: Participants' academic level

Year at University	Number	Percentage
Freshman	16	12%
Sophomore	70	54%
Junior	12	9%
Senior	32	25%

3.3 Research instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The quantitative data was collected via closed-ended questions in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was an adaptation of Duong and Ta's (2022), which was developed based on the literature on SRL strategies in the studies by Zumbrunn et al. (2011), Pintrich (2000), Oxford (1990), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). While this questionnaire was grounded on well-known SRL theories, including Oxford (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990), the items within its sub-components were appropriate for measuring strategies specific to reading skills. There was a brief introduction about the information of the researchers and the research topic before the main parts of the questionnaire to guarantee that the participants understood the research goals and volunteered to participate in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, including the respondent's demographic data and their reported self-regulated learning strategies in reading.

The central part of the questionnaire included 32 items about self-regulated learning strategies, which were divided into eight categories (Table 3): goal setting (3 items), planning (5 items), self-motivation (5 items), attention control (4 items), flexible use of strategies (3 items), self-monitoring (4 items), help-seeking (4 items) and self-evaluation (4 items). After scrutinizing it, the researchers decided to make minor wording modifications to the original version to suit the participants and the study setting, specifically, to fit the research goal of focusing on reading. For example, the word "my studies" was changed to "my reading skills" throughout the items. For content validity and clarity, after adapting and translating the items into Vietnamese, the questionnaire was checked by two teachers, who are experts in the field, and faculty at the university. For this part, the resulting 32-item questions administered to 130 respondents yielded a reliability Cronbach Alpha of 0.855, which suggested the appropriateness of the instrument. To allow an option for neutral opinion commonly found in self-rated measurement, the researchers applied a Likert scale consisting of 5 levels: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always, instead of 4 levels in the original version in previous studies.

Table 3: Classification of self-regulated learning strategies

Categories	Items
Goal-setting	1, 2, 3
Planning	4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Self-motivation	9, 10, 11, 12, 13

Table 3: Classification of self-regulated learning strategies (continued)

| Categories	Items
Attention control	14, 15, 16, 17
Flexible use of learning strategies	18, 19, 20
Self-monitoring	21, 22, 23, 24
Help-seeking	25, 26, 27, 28
Self-evaluation	29, 30, 31, 32

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interview

In mixed methods research, semi-structured interviews can be beneficial for supplementing and enhancing findings from the quantitative data, widely used in field studies and classroom-based research (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In semi-structured interviews, participants feel comfortable expressing their understanding, experience, and thoughts freely, but staying focused on a topic brings more value to the study. Therefore, this study employed a semi-structured interview to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' employment of self-regulated learning strategies and the challenges they might have in their reading. The interview section in this study included five questions about the difficulties the participants faced in learning to read, their techniques, and strategies to overcome these. The questions were developed based on the study's objectives and focused on aspects that the questionnaire could not address. The questions were piloted and consulted with two experienced teachers for clarity. All the questions were in Vietnamese, the mother tongue of the researchers and the study's participants. The interviews were conducted as informal conversations lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The responses were recorded with the participants' agreement. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed. Relevant information was selected, translated into English, and presented.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Results from the questionnaire

4.1.1 The students' employment of self-regulated learning strategies in reading
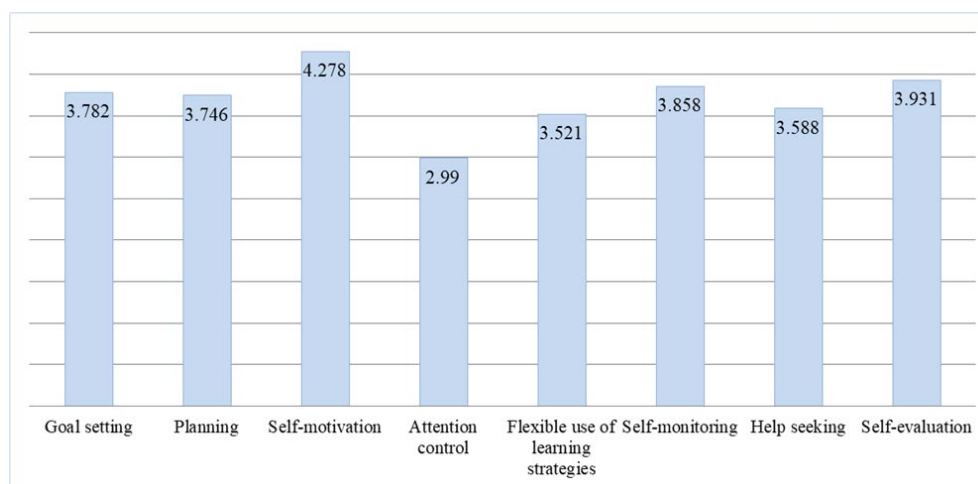
Figure 1: The means of eight SRL categories (N = 130)

The bar chart in Figure 1 shows the levels of SRL strategies that the participants employed, indicated by the means in eight strategy clusters. The visual presentation of data illustrates that students have a high frequency of using these strategies in reading. As can be seen, students tended to implement *self-motivation* the most among the eight clusters, with the highest mean score of 4.278 rated for this category. *Self-evaluation* and *self-monitoring* also receive high ratings with mean averages of 3.931 and 3.858, respectively. Following these strategies, *goal-setting* and *planning* have lower average scores at 3.782 and 3.746. In decreasing order of rating, *help-seeking* (M = 3.558) and *flexible use of learning strategies* (M = 3.521) are less frequently employed in reading. The lowest use of self-regulated learning strategies is related to the category *attention control* (M = 2.99).

Table 4: Self-regulated learning strategies: Goal setting

Goal Setting	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 1. I set goals for myself to direct my activities when I do a reading task.	0.8	8.5	33.8	44.6	12.3	3.592
Item 2. I try to understand the goal of a task before I attempt to answer.	1.5	7.7	16.2	42.3	32.2	3.962
Item 3. I figure out my goals to accomplish the tasks.	0	9.2	23.1	46.9	20.8	3.792
Total						**3.782**

Table 4 presents the frequency of implementing each of the three *goal-setting* strategies. It can be seen that students tend to employ the strategy "I try to understand the goal of a task before I attempt to answer" more regularly than the other two strategies in *goal setting*, with 42.3% choosing "often" and 32.2% "always". The mean score of this strategy is the highest among the three items, equaling 3.962. It is followed by the strategy "I figure out my goal to accomplish the tasks", with the percentages of students choosing "often" and "always" being 46.9% and 20.8%, respectively. The mean value of this strategy is 3.792. In contrast, students less consistently make plans for direct activities when they do reading exercises (Item 1: M = 3.592), with a small percentage for "always".

Table 5: Self-regulated learning strategies: Planning

Planning	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 4. I determine how to solve a task before I begin reading.	3.1	11.5	30.8	36.9	17.7	3.546
Item 5. I estimate the time and make plans before I read.	4.6	21.5	28.5	30	15.4	3.3
Item 6. I try to understand tasks before I attempt to solve them.	0	3.1	15.4	43.8	37.7	4.162
Item 7. I imagine the parts of a task I have to complete.	4.6	14.6	31.5	33.8	15.4	3.408
Item 8. I try to determine what the task requires.	0.8	1.5	11.5	37.7	48.5	4.315
Total						**3.746**

Like *goal setting* strategies, students often use *planning* strategies with an average mean score of M = 3.746 (see Table 5). Among the five items within this category, students have a high employment frequency for the strategy in item 8 "I try to determine what the task requires", (M = 4.315), with 48.5% stating "always" and 37.7% stating "often". In a similar vein, it can be seen that 37.7% of students select "always" and 43.8% "often" for the item "I try to understand tasks before I attempt to solve them" (Item 6, M = 4.162). These strategies (items 8 and 6) are comparatively higher than others (items 4, 5, and 7) in the category of *planning*. Item 4 (M = 3.546) and item 7 (M = 3.408) are above the lowest frequency of use - item 5 with M = 3.3.

Table 6: Self-regulated learning strategies: Self-motivation

Self-motivation	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 9. I do not blame others for my reading skills.	0	2.3	7.7	21.5	68.5	4.562
Item 10. I am willing to learn new skills that will help me enhance my reading skills.	1.5	3.1	10.8	48	43.8	4.223
Item 11. I have a strong desire to achieve goals and succeed.	0.8	4.6	17.7	40.8	36.2	4.069
Item 12. I am open to criticism from other people about my reading skills.	1.5	4.6	11.5	45.4	36.9	4.115

Table 6: Self-regulated learning strategies: Self-motivation (continued)

Self-motivation	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 13. I am willing to acquire new knowledge for my betterment.	0	1.5	10.8	31.5	56.2	4.423
Total						**4.278**

Referring to Table 6, students mostly use *self-motivation* strategies among the eight clusters, which are measured by five items. With 68.5% of the participants choosing "always" for item 9, the mean score for this strategy is significantly high (M = 4.562). Furthermore, over half of the students (31.5% for "often" and 56.2% for "always") rate high for item 13, "I am willing to acquire new knowledge for my betterment," which results in a very high mean, M = 4.423. Noticeably, no choice of "never" is recorded for these two items, 9 and 13. Interestingly, all strategies within this category – *self-motivation* – as expressed in items 9 to 13, are frequently used, with all mean scores higher than 4.

Table 7: Self-regulated learning strategies: Attention control

Attention control	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 14. My concentration is good even if there is music or noise in the room around me.	13.1	22.3	37.7	20.0	6.9	2.854
Item 15. I am not easily distracted if there are people talking in the same room when I am reading.	13.8	25.4	31.5	20.8	8.5	2.846
Item 16. I can focus my attention so that I become unaware of what's going on in the room around me.	11.5	21.5	36.9	24.6	5.4	2.908
Item 17. I can easily shift my attention back to what I was doing before.	0.8	16.9	35.4	40.0	6.9	3.354
Total						**2.99**

In contrast to other categories, strategies in *attention control* are the least utilized by participants in the study, with the category mean score M = 2.99. There are 4 items in this group of strategies (see Table 7). Most items are not employed frequently in general. The rare, mildly high score is 40% for the option "often" in item 17, "I can easily shift my attention back to what I was doing before," which has a mean M = 3.354. Overall, the data in this category indicates that students find it hard to concentrate when they are bothered by external physical distractions.

Table 8: Self-regulated learning strategies: Flexible use of learning strategies

Flexible use of learning strategies	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 18. I make lists of important keywords to memorize the topic.	0.8	8.5	35.4	43.8	11.5	3.569
Item 19. I pull together information from different sources such as lectures, readings, and discussions.	2.3	13.8	28.5	40.8	14.6	3.515
Item 20. I choose appropriate strategies for each task.	1.5	9.2	40.0	38.5	10.8	3.477
Total						**3.521**

Table 8 shows that the degree of *flexibility* in SRL strategies is slightly low, with a general category mean equal to M = 3.521. In all three items within this cluster, although most students choose "sometimes", "often", and "always", the mean for each item is relatively low, just slightly under or above 3.50. Item 20 (M =

3.477) shows that the participants are not flexible and cannot effectively select strategies appropriate for themselves.

Table 9: Self-regulated learning strategies: Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 21. I check how well I am doing when I solve a task.	2.3	6.2	24.6	50.0	16.9	3.731
Item 22. I ask myself questions to stay on track as I do a task.	3.8	15.4	31.5	34.6	14.6	3.408
Item 23. I correct my mistakes in exercises.	0.8	3.8	16.2	37.7	41.5	4.154
Item 24. I check my accuracy as I progress through a task.	0.8	2.3	13.1	50.0	33.8	4.138
Total						**3.858**

As shown in Table 9, the average mean score of the category *self-monitoring* is relatively high, with M = 3.858. As for the component strategies, learners tend to employ those expressed in items 23 and 24, the mean scores of which are 4.154 and 4.138, respectively. Moreover, for these two strategies, the percentages of the option "always" are much higher than those of others in the cluster (41.5% for item 23 and 33.8% for item 24). The means for the remaining 2 items are relatively high, 3.731 for item 21 and 3.408 for item 22.

Table 10: Self-regulated learning strategies: Help-seeking

Help-seeking	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 25. I try to solve troubles in the reading task by myself first.	0	2.3	20.8	44.6	32.3	4.069
Item 26. I ask the instructor to clarify concepts I don't understand well.	6.9	23.8	28.5	28.5	12.3	3.154
Item 27. When I can't understand the reading materials, I ask other students for help.	3.8	9.2	23.1	43.8	20.0	3.669
Item 28. I try to identify students in this class with whom I can ask for help if necessary.	3.8	13.8	30.0	36.9	15.4	3.462
Total						**3.588**

Table 10 presents the rating results for *help-seeking* strategies, with a middle average mean score (M = 3.588). The highest rating is in item 25, "I try to solve troubles in the reading task by myself first." 44.6% of the participants select the option "often," and 32.3% select "always," and the item mean is as high as 4.069. The other items, 27, 28, and 26, receive modest mean scores of 3.669, 3.462, and 3.154, respectively.

Table 11: Self-regulated learning strategies: Self-evaluation

Self-Evaluation	Percentage %					Mean
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Item 29. I double-checked to make sure I did my reading task right.	0	4.6	15.4	38.5	41.5	4.169
Item 30. I look back to see if I did the correct procedures when doing a reading task.	0.8	10.8	27.7	31.5	29.2	3.777
Item 31. I look back at the problem to see if my answer makes sense.	0	3.8	20.0	40.0	36.2	4.085
Item 32. I rethink each step in doing a reading task that I have already done.	2.3	8.5	30.8	34.6	23.8	3.692
Total						**3.931**

Table 11 shows the frequency of use and mean scores regarding the strategies in the category of *self-evaluation*. As noted, the average mean score of the whole category is 3.931, which is relatively high. Taking each strategy separately, item 29 "*I double-check to make sure I did my reading task right*" has the highest mean (M = 4.169), with 38.5% choosing "often" and 41.5% choosing "always". Coming in second place, item 31 "*I look back at the problem to see if my answer makes sense*" achieves a mean of 4.085, with 40% choosing "often" and 36.2% choosing "always". Those strategies are comparatively more frequently utilized than others in *self-evaluation*. Besides, students often reconsider their process to reach the results, the strategies demonstrated in items 30 (M = 3.777) and 32 (M = 3.692).

4.1.2 The difference between male and female students in using SRL strategies

Table 12: Comparison of self-regulated learning strategies used by two genders

Classifications	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	p
Goal setting	Male	31	3.634	0.795	0.143	-1.299	0.196
	Female	99	3.828	0.702	0.071		
Planning	Male	31	3.639	0.538	0.097	-1.178	0.241
	Female	99	3.780	0.595	0.060		
Self-motivation	Male	31	4.265	0.530	0.095	-0.160	0.873
	Female	99	4.283	0.564	0.057		
Attention control	Male	31	3.081	0.958	0.172	0.641	0.525
	Female	99	2.962	0.676	0.068		
Flexible use of learning strategies	Male	31	3.355	0.760	0.136	-1.544	0.125
	Female	99	3.572	0.660	0.066		
Self-monitoring	Male	31	3.702	0.726	0.130	-1.462	0.152
	Female	99	3.907	0.513	0.052		
Help-seeking	Male	31	3.444	0.712	0.128	-1.439	0.153
	Female	99	3.634	0.620	0.062		
Self-evaluation	Male	31	3.823	0.560	0.101	-1.074	0.285
	Female	99	3.965	0.666	0.067		

The difference in employing SRL strategies among students according to their gender is determined via the result of the Independent Sample t-test (see Table 12). There are no significant differences when considering the t-value and p-value regarding gender toward the eight clusters of SRL strategies (p = 0.196, p = 0.241, p = 0.873, p = 0.525, p = 0.125, p = 0.152, p = 0.153, p = 0.285; p > 0.05). In terms of mean score, the value of *self-motivation* witnesses a noticeable gap, indicating that both the male group (M = 4.265) and the female one (M = 4.283) tend to employ this strategy more frequently than other factors. The male group employs *attention control* more frequently than the female group, with M = 3.081 and M = 2.962, respectively. In addition, minimal differences are observed in four sub-categories: *self-monitoring, goal setting, help-seeking,* and *flexible use of learning strategies.* In particular, *self-monitoring* is occasionally employed more than others by the two groups, with a mean score of 3.907 and 3.702 for female and male students, respectively. While both groups implement *goal setting* rather often at the middle level, the male group appears to have a lower mean score of 3.634 compared to the female one at 3.828. Thus, the mean value in *help-seeking* indicates that the female group (M = 3.634) utilizes this strategy more often than the male group (M = 3.444). It is proven that *flexible learning strategies* are applied less frequently by male and female learners, with the mean values at 3.355 and 3.572, respectively. Finally, there is a tiny gap between male and female learners in implementing *planning* and *self-evaluation* strategies.

4.2 Results from the interviews

Selective information is discussed and categorized into main points corresponding to the interview questions. The students' answers in the interviews related to the range of difficulties they faced in learning reading comprehension, their overcoming methods, and further concerns about employing strategies in reading.

4.2.1 Students' difficulties in reading comprehension

The students in this study stated that they faced many problems learning to read, especially when they did a reading task. Most students struggled with reading materials, felt confused and indecisive about their choices, and implemented multiple strategies simultaneously. One of the most significant challenges students confronted in reading tasks was time management. Also, the students reported difficulty understanding reading texts because of the complex vocabulary, which discouraged them and led to failing their specific reading goals.

> "I feel a little tough in combining various strategies in the process of reading." (translated excerpt of interview 1)

> "The allocation of time is very difficult for me. The waste of time makes me depressed, tired, and unwilling to do anything or partly because of a difficult topic." (translated excerpt of interview 2)

> "I am confused with a lot of new vocabulary, which is also my biggest difficulty, so I cannot concentrate on the reading text and give the correct answer. Moreover, the length of the text distracts me and wastes time reading the whole passage." (translated excerpt of interview 5)

The interviews revealed other challenges, including concentrating and remaining concentrated. Similarly, limited memorizing capacity is also a significant difficulty. The students admitted that during their reading tasks, they could not remember all the information needed to answer the following questions. As mentioned earlier, this challenge seemed to intensify once coupled with insufficient linguistic competence. The students could struggle with long reading passages packed with unfamiliar, complicated vocabulary. Some students report the following.

> "I think that reading comprehension requires a high level of concentration when I have to read and understand the meaning, hence, I have to answer at the same time. Occasionally, I cannot complete my task well when I am in a noisy place." (translated excerpt of interview 3)

> "I think I have difficulty memorizing. When I read a question, I have to look over it several times to find the answer, because of poor memory." (translated excerpt of interview 4)

4.2.2 Strategies to overcome reading problems

As a solution, the interviewed students reported that tips, for example, modifying reading goals or plans and seeking support, could be efficient. Most students reported that they usually set an overall goal and make a plan to attain the goal. In particular, the participants determined their goals and plans according to specific reading tasks but modified them when needed. An example of this modification was rearranging the order of the reading steps, or deciding which tasks or exercises need to be done first. Importantly, the interviewed students recognized that setting goals and appropriate planning played a vital role in their learning, especially in learning reading comprehension. Applying proper strategies would bring about effective task performance, and this in turn motivated them to make more effort and keep trying to get better results in any successive tasks.

> "I think setting a goal is extremely important, particularly reading comprehension. I aim to complete as many questions as possible" [....] "I tend to make a plan for myself, like reading carefully the question, then I choose strategies based on the type of task requirement to do well and reach the goal." (translated excerpt of interview 1)

> "I usually set a goal for my studying, which can be to do more than 30 questions in 20 minutes for one reading. Setting a goal is quite necessary because it makes me feel that I have to take charge in doing the task carefully instead of making it perfunctorily." (translated excerpt of interview 2)

> "In my mind, when I set a specific goal, I will have more motivation to push myself to make efforts in doing the reading task and in the development of my English skills in general." (translated excerpt of interview 4)

To deal with issues connected to reading, feeling dissatisfied and stressed, relying on external support was perceived as helpful by the interview respondents. The interviewed students reported that when they forgot their initial goals or got lost in the reading acquisition process, they could try to regain motivation not only by self-monitoring, refining their goals, and discovering new strategies applicable to them but also by seeking the support of their teachers, friends, and other resources.

"When I have issues with my reading comprehension, I am going to redefine the type of task, the objective of the query." (translated excerpt of interview 1)

"Therefore, I would highlight unfamiliar phrases and vocabulary that I should learn, and then I will ask my friends to explain these meanings to me. Moreover, I actively search for answers from online sources and refer to new strategies that are more proper for the reading task." (translated excerpt of interview 3)

"I will find my teacher to get an assistant, whom I know better, and ensure that they can help me to re-examine and understand the information, as well as learn how to choose the appropriate way and solve the problems in the best way achievable." (translated excerpt of interview 5)

4.2.3 Students' further concerns in employing reading strategies

It was revealed that most of the students in the study recognized the effectiveness of self-regulated learning strategies as significantly impacting their ability to modify learning and motivate themselves. These strategies allowed them to gain more experience after they completed a reading task. Employing strategies appropriately also helped the students avoid repeating previous mistakes and achieve better results in the future. This positive attitude was reflected in the interview excerpts below.

"Applying these strategies creates positive production in the answer because when I struggle with the difficulties, I can combine some suitable strategies." (translated excerpt of interview 1)

"I believe that self-regulated learning strategies are quite beneficial in terms of motivating me to learn as well as assessing my progress in reading abilities. [....] These strategies do not enhance my reading comprehension immediately, but I feel that I improve better day by day after using self-regulated learning strategies." (translated excerpt of interview 2)

"This is a crucial skill for me to understand my goals and accurate strategies to ensure that I can remember the ways I do this task and gain more useful knowledge, which can be utilized in various kinds of reading tasks and boost my reading comprehension." (translated excerpt of interview 5)

The interviewees' responses indicated that they had a high awareness and strong determination in attempts to form and develop their self-regulation to become better readers. The students said that they learned the strategies from a variety of sources that were available to them to ultimately achieve improved reading comprehension. Most strategies were learned via the Internet and through self-study. In general, the students looked for these methods when they did reading tasks, and through their self-reflection, they could gain more knowledge and find suitable strategies for themselves. In their words, the resources on the Internet were those that they could read and reread many times until they clearly understood.

"When I do homework at home and meet some difficult requirements, I will proactively search via the internet and analyze it to get a deep understanding." (translated excerpt of interview 2)

"Most of the strategies I employ in my reading task are from online sources. Many videos show how to answer the task, and the instructors in these videos also give some effective strategies that I can consider for the next tasks." (translated excerpt of interview 3)

"I learn through posts in social media, and I also participate in some groups on Facebook, which will help me to find the answers and give some solutions." (translated excerpt of interview 4)

Besides learning to use SRL strategies from the Internet through self-study activities, the participants also highlighted the role of their reading instructors in class. The students said they learned useful techniques and strategies to develop better readers from their teachers' lessons. Moreover, they also gained knowledge about these practical strategies from their real experience with the reading tasks.

"It is my self-assessment while doing the reading exercise, others are taught by teachers." (translated excerpt of interview 1)

"From my experience, I gained some experiences that I have accessed from my teachers." (translated excerpt of interview 5)

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study reveals that the participants frequently employ a wide range of SRL strategies in their reading activities, with varying degrees across the reading strategy types. One possible explanation is that they

have a high awareness of their learning goal, as well as realize the importance of reading comprehension in learning a foreign language. With a relatively high level of employment, these students have a better possibility of achieving success in foreign language learning, particularly in reading comprehension. This finding is similar to the results in many of the previous studies. The high frequency and mean scores in most single strategies and strategy categories suggest a positive indication of the learners' likelihood of possessing reading skills, effectiveness, and success. This is based on the general premise that applying more SRL strategies in reading could certainly enhance EFL learners' reading ability and achievement in reading tests (Abbasian & Hartoonian, 2014; Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014). Moreover, with SRL strategies, the students tend to be more responsible for their learning, so they not only learn more effectively in reading but also progress in other courses (Sutiono et al., 2022).

Regarding the eight clusters of SRL strategies, the students in this study tend to be more favorable and frequent users of *self-motivation, goal-setting, planning,* and *self-evaluation* strategies. The two groups, *self-monitoring* and *help-seeking*, are strategies they use at a moderate degree, while *flexible strategies* and *attention control* strategies are used the least frequently. English majors in the study tend to employ *self-motivation* strategies in the process of their reading comprehension development, which helps them stay motivated and keeps them striving to deal with difficulties. They also show a sense of responsibility in learning to read and put in possible efforts into achieving their goals. In addition, these students show an average frequency of using *self-evaluation* strategies, which are usually needed later in a reading task when they are expected to reflect and make adjustments necessary for their future tasks. Since it may generally be assumed that all related SRL strategies are equally important, the differences in employment frequencies serve to spot the areas that need to improve and the specific strategies that are worth more attention. Although the results suggest that the students utilized these SRL strategies regularly, this reality could only be coincidental; the students intuitively learn how they think this is good for them. It cannot be said that they are necessarily aware of SRL strategies, and instructions regarding SRL strategies are still needed.

It is worth noting that there is no statistically significant difference in employing SRL strategies between male and female students. However, female students have slightly higher average scores than male students in most subcategories of SRL strategies. The reason why there is no difference in terms of gender could be explained by the fact that both males and females have the same learning conditions. Moreover, some studies found that the length of the study did not have an impact on the implementation of SRL strategies in learning (Sutiono et al., 2022; Tran & Phan Tran, 2021). This suggests that strategy instructions should be given equally to the two genders, and continuously during the students' time at university.

Other findings regarding challenges in reading also suggest pedagogical considerations. In particular, students reported various problems in their reading comprehension, including grasping the gist of the material, lacking vocabulary, managing time, memorizing the context, and selecting strategies that work for them. However, the students recommended helpful strategies and methods to overcome the challenges, based on their experience. These include setting goals, building plans, recovering motivation, and seeking help from others. Although the data from quantitative and qualitative measures provide overall averages, students may certainly differ individually. It is, therefore, helpful for EFL teachers to apply diagnostic tests of SRL to understand their specific class and plan their lessons accordingly.

6. CONCLUSION

The study aims to explore the English majors' employment of self-regulated learning strategies in reading comprehension. According to the research, students have a high tendency to employ self-regulated learning strategies when learning reading comprehension. In particular, they are aware of the beneficial effects of SRL strategies on reading comprehension as well as the importance of being self-regulated when learning a foreign language. It is believed that students who self-regulate their learning have a greater opportunity to have good reading comprehension abilities and succeed in learning a foreign language. Moreover, SRL strategies can be built up as a habit for lifelong learning. In particular, reading comprehension plays a vital role in achieving language and other courses, which is an important factor in gaining knowledge. In terms of the eight clusters in SRL, learners use the following from the highest: self-motivation, self-evaluation, self-monitoring, goal setting, planning, help-seeking, flexible use of strategies, and attention control. The more self-regulated students are, the better they implement, and the more responsible they are in their learning.

The study reveals that gender is not a significant factor affecting the use of SRL strategies in reading comprehension. Female students apply certain SRL strategies only slightly more frequently than male students. In addition, the study identifies students' challenges in improving their reading comprehension, mainly related to selecting and implementing strategies, a shortage of vocabulary to understand the reading context, and a lack of reading motivation. It is believed that SRL strategies can help students overcome these obstacles. For

instance, when students use goal-setting and planning strategies, they can have a clear pathway and a sense of determination to follow. Similarly, with flexibility, students can utilize various strategies to monitor and track their progress and stay motivated to continue pursuing their goals. In addition, students can learn how to employ various strategies to cope with specific problems. Students can apply self-evaluation strategies to self-assess how much they acquire after learning, and ultimately, they can transfer all these skills and strategies to similar tasks in the future.

It is transparent that SRL techniques benefit students not just for short-term goals but also for long-term ones. Students can develop SRL strategies as valuable skills applied in other courses or disciplines; these strategies can be effective for lifelong learning. However, sufficient instruction and practice are required to achieve such results.

Although the basic objectives of this study were attained, it still bore some limitations. For example, the study sample consisted of English language majors at the university who were fairly motivated and advanced learners. Future studies may increase heterogeneity by including a wider range of participants, e.g., non-English majors or high school students. Also, the study involved students from a single university in the Mekong Delta who share similar sociocultural characteristics. A comparative study across more institutions or with the inclusion of an institution beyond the region could sketch a fuller picture of a Vietnamese student profile regarding SRL. In addition to this, similar studies could also be extended to other language skills.

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APPENDIX

The interview questions:
1. Bạn có thường đặt ra mục tiêu cho bản thân khi bạn làm một bài đọc không? Bạn có lên kế hoạch để có thể đạt mục tiêu đó không?
   (Do you set goals for your own in doing a reading task? Do you plan the steps well to achieve the goals?)
2. Những chiến lược mà bạn đã thực hiện để hoàn thành bài mỗi khi làm bài có phải kinh nghiệm mà bạn tích lũy được từ quá trình tự học hay là được hướng dẫn từ các thầy cô?
   (Where do the strategies you use come from? From your experience doing reading tasks or from teachers' instructions?)
3. Những khó khăn nào mà bạn thường gặp khi sử dụng các chiến lược tự học trong khi học môn đọc?
   (What are the challenges you have in applying these reading strategies?)
4. Khi gặp khó khăn như vậy bạn có tìm những cách khác để giúp bản thân tìm lại động lực, không bị chán nản và tiếp tục hoành thành bài tốt?
   (When faced with problems, do you find an alternative method to regain motivation and continue your reading tasks?)
5. Bạn cảm thấy thế nào về sự hiệu quả của các chiến lược tự học khi sử dụng trong lúc làm bài đọc?
   (What further comments do you have regarding the effectiveness of your reading strategies?)