Original Article

The Employment of Self-regulated Learning Strategies in Learning English at a Ho Chi Minh City-based High School

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Abstract: Self-regulated learning strategies are referred to as learning processes which students conduct independently and purposefully such as goal setting, planning, motivating, attention controlling, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. Student's academic achievements, therefore, are supposed to be affected by their self-regulated learning strategies employment. The present study aims to investigate to what extent 90 twelfth graders use self-regulated learning strategies to learn English at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City. The quantitative data collected via a closed-ended questionnaire were statistically analyzed by means of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 (i.e., mean and standard deviation). The findings showed that the surveyed students generally employed eight categories of self-regulated learning strategies including goal setting, planning, self-motivation, flexible use of learning strategies, attention control, self-monitoring, help seeking, and self-evaluation during their English learning. Amongst the self-regulated learning strategies categories, the goal setting strategies were the number-one category while the self-evaluation strategies were the least used category. Based on the preliminary results of this study, some pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research on the employment of self-regulated learning strategies in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts are given.

Keywords: English learning and teaching, high school student, self-regulated learning, self-regulated learning strategy.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that learners' language proficiency may be attributed to the use of self-regulated learning strategies (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002 [1]; Tran & Duong, 2013 [2]; Zimmerman, 1990 [3]; Zimmerman, 2002 [4]). More specifically, Tran and Duong (2013) [2] discovered that the more English as a foreign language (EFL) learners used self-regulated learning strategies, the more academic achievements they gained. Furthermore,

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Kauffman (2004) [5] claimed that learners' levels of language proficiency can be categorized based on the employment of self-regulated learning strategies. It can be inferred that self-regulated learning strategies are likely to benefit EFL learners during their learning process. It is worth noting that learners needed to use self-regulated learning strategies properly although they endeavored to apply these strategies to achieve autonomous learning goals (Tran & Nguyen, 2020) [6].

In the context of EFL teaching and learning in Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic, learners spend most of their time learning online to deal with assignments or tasks provided by their teachers. Therefore, self-regulated learning which is referred to as "a process that assists students in managing their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in order to successfully navigate their learning experiences" (Zumbrunn, Tadlock & Roberts, 2011, pp. 4) [7] should be promoted. As a result of the prominence of self-regulated learning, further research on the use of self-regulated learning strategies in an EFL classroom is necessarily carried out. In practice, a wide range of studies have been conducted in the world; however, there have been few studies on high school students' self-regulated learning strategies use in learning English in Vietnam. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate to what extent the 12th graders at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City used self-regulated learning strategies in English language learning. The research question is as follows.

To what extent do 12th graders employ self-regulated learning strategies in English language learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Definition of Self-regulated Learning Strategies*

Self-regulated learning strategies are defined as positive procedures in which learners endeavor to monitor, adjust, and manage their behaviors, motivations, actions, and emotions based on their learning goals and learning conditions (Pintrich, 2000) [8]. Likewise, Zimmerman (2015) [9] revealed that self-regulated learning strategies were self-initiated methods designed to improve learning performance such as making multistep plans to tackle mathematics problems. In the present research, self-regulated learning strategies are studied based on Zumbrunn et al., (2011) [7] categorization of self-regulated learning strategies which includes goal setting, planning, self-motivation, attention control, flexible use of learning strategies, self-monitoring, help seeking and self-evaluation.

2.2. *Classification of Self-regulated Learning Strategies*

More specifically, goal setting refers to setting educational or extra goals, arranging the timetable, and completing activities which are confirmed in goals [4]. González (2013) [10] argued that the success of employing self-regulated learning strategies varies and depends on the learning context and individual's goals. Planning is processed to help students specify learning targets, and determine suitable learning strategies, materials, and time to complete a task. Zimmerman (2002) [4] verified that goal setting and strategic planning were evidence to promote students' academic achievement. Self-motivation occurs when students independently employ learning activities to meet learning targets [7]. Geller (2016) [11] showed that self-motivation was at the heart of creativity, responsibility, wellness, behavior, and a long-term opportunity. Attention control is also considered as an self-regulated learning strategies category in which students can control their attention without any distractions from the surroundings, so they easily gain information in the textbook or knowledge from the teachers. With reference to flexible use of learning strategies, [12] highlighted that the more learning strategies students used, the higher performance they may achieve. Self-monitoring strategies are activities of regulation, learners

monitor their own process, e.g., goal setting, planning, self-motivation, attention control and using learning strategies. During the learning process, students may encounter problems or unexpected situations, they can deploy help seeking strategies to look for counseling to solve such problems. The last self-regulated learning strategies category is self-evaluation strategies involving students' self-assessed performances based on some criteria [4].

2.3. Previous Studies

There have been several previous studies on self-regulated learning strategies [2, 6, 13, 14]. Particularly, Simona and Carlo (2015) [13] examined the correlation between three groups of high school students' use of self-regulated learning strategies and their academic achievement in Italy. The results highlighted a distinction among the three groups of students: The first group who employed self-regulated learning strategies effectively had high academic achievement, whereas the two others who were insufficient in the regulation of emotion and cognition had weaker academic achievement. Woottipong (2020) [14] studied the employment of self-regulated learning strategies of students in six high schools in Thailand, and the findings showed that students used various strategies including cognition strategies, metacognition strategies, monitoring strategies, environmental strategies, and motivational strategies. In the context of Vietnam, Tran and Duong (2013) endeavored to investigate Vietnamese college students' attitudes towards their process of English language learning and their use of self-regulated learning strategies. It was concluded that they used self-regulated learning strategies at a low level despite the positive attitudes towards their English learning. There was also a positive correlation of their learning attitudes with their academic achievement. In addition, Tran and Nguyen (2020) [6] aimed to explore the use of self-regulated learning strategies of English majors in a university. The findings indicated

the participants' moderate use of self-regulated learning strategies.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Context and Participants

This study was undertaken at a Ho Chi Minh City-based high school. In the academic year 2020-2021, the total number of students at this research site is approximately 1.500 which is divided into three grades, namely grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12. There were almost 40 students in each class.

The participants included 90 12th graders. In particular, there were 50 males (55.6%) and 40 females (44.4%). Most of them were at the age of 17 (90%), others were at the age of 18 (10%). Regarding time for learning English per day, more than half of the participants (58.9%) spent from one to three hours learning English per day, whereas 36.7% and 4.4% of them took less than one hour and more than three hours to do so respectively.

3.2. Research Instruments

The study was quantitative research in which quantitative data were gathered via a closed-ended questionnaire because of three reasons: i) The data collected from a questionnaire can be calculated for data analysis easily; ii) A questionnaire is useful to get data on sensitive fields; and iii) Using a questionnaire is economical [11].

This study employed a closed-ended questionnaire to collect the data. The questionnaire which was adapted from [7] and [8] contains two main sections. The first section aimed to get individual information such as gender, age, grade, how much time they spend on learning English per day. The second section comprised of 37 scale items relating to the employment of eight categories (goal setting: 3 items, planning: 5 items, self-motivation: 5 items, attention control: 5 items, flexible use of learning strategies: 5 items, self-monitoring: 5 items, help seeking: 4 items, and

self- evaluation: 5 items) in self-regulated learning strategies. They were examined in five-point Likert scale (never, seldom, sometimes, usually, always). To guarantee the reliability of the questionnaire, all the information in the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese. The pitot questionnaire was carried out by three non-participants of the study to ensure its reliability. Moreover, the Cronbach's Alpha value of 37 items of self-regulated learning strategies calculated was 0.97, which indicates that the reliability of the questionnaire items is very high.

3.3. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The online questionnaires were delivered to 90 students because students were not allowed to go to school. After one day, the researcher collected 90 copies of questionnaire (100%)

which were all accepted. To find out the answer for the question of to what extent the participants utilized self-regulated learning strategies, the researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The quantitative data were analyzed to find out the mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD). The mean score of each category is interpreted as follows: Never: 1.00- 1.80, seldom: 1.81-2.60, sometimes: 2.61-3.40, usually: 3.41-4.20 and always: 4.21-5.00.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Table 1 shows the overall mean score (M) and Standard deviation (SD) of employing eight groups of self-regulated learning strategies in English language learning

Table 1. The categories of self-regulated learning strategies employed by the high school students

No.	Eight strategies of self-regulated learning strategies	Rank	M	SD
1	Goal setting	1	4.04	0.89
2	Planning	2	3.80	0.68
3	Self-motivation	3	3.77	0.74
4	Help seeking	4	3.72	0.65
5	Self-monitoring	5	3.66	0.70
6	Flexible use of learning strategies	6	3.60	0.72
7	Attention control	7	3.59	0.62
8	Self-evaluation	8	3.58	0.84
Average			**3.72**	**0.65**

It can be seen in Table 1 that the average mean score of the eight categories shows the high frequency of self-regulated learning strategies used by the students for learning English (M=3.72; SD=0.65). This means that the students usually employed self-regulated learning strategies. Among the eight categories, the students tended to apply goal setting strategies most frequently than others (M=4.04; SD=0.89), followed by strategies of planning

(M=3.80; SD=0.68); self-motivation strategies (M=3.77; SD=0.74), help seeking (M=3.72; SD=0.65), self-monitoring (M=3.66; SD=0.70), flexible use of learning strategies (M=3.60; SD=0.72); attention control (M=3.59; SD=0.62), and self-evaluation (M=3.58; SD=0.84). In short, the students used self-regulated learning strategies in their English learning at a high level.

Table 2. Goal setting strategies

No.	Goal setting	M	SD
1	I set goals for myself to direct my activities in each study period.	3.84	1.09
2	I try to understand the goal of a task before I attempt to answer.	4.14	0.93
3	I figure out my goals to accomplish the tasks.	4.12	1.00
Average		**4.04**	**0.89**

The results of Table 2 reveal that goal setting strategies were usually applied when they studied English (M=4.04; SD=0.89). There are three activities in goal setting strategies such as "[trying] to understand the goal of a task before I attempt to answer" (M=4.14; SD=0.93), "[figuring] out my goals to accomplish the tasks" (M=4.12; SD=1.00), "[setting] goals for myself to direct my activities in each study period" (M=3.84; SD=1.09). It can be understood that the students preferably used the goal setting strategies.

Table 3. Planning strategies

No.	Planning	M	SD
4	I determine how to solve a task before I begin.	4.00	1.05
5	I carefully plan my course of action.	3.70	0.77
6	I try to understand tasks before I attempt to solve them.	3.74	0.87
7	I imagine the parts of a task I have to complete.	3.76	0.81
8	I try to determine what the task requires.	3.78	0.85
Average		**3.80**	**0.68**

As observed in Table 3, the average mean score of planning strategies was pretty high (M=3.80; SD=0.68). It demonstrates that the students often used planning strategies. Of the five activities, the students mostly chose the item "determine how to solve a task before I begin" (M=4.00; SD=1.05). The next four items consisted of "try[ing] to determine what the task requires" (M=3.78; SD=0.85), "[imagining] the parts of a task I have to complete" (M=3.76; SD=.81), "try[ing] to

understand tasks before I attempt to solve them" (M=3.74; SD=0.87), "carefully plan[ning] my course of action" (M=3.70; SD=0.77). To sum up, the planning strategies were frequently employed by the students.

Table 4. Self-motivation strategies

No.	Self-motivation	M	SD
9	I do not blame others for my studies.	3.68	0.97
10	I am willing to learn new skills that will help me in my studying.	3.76	0.94
11	I have a strong desire to achieve goals and succeed.	3.91	0.84
12	I am open to criticism from other people about my studying.	3.69	1.01
13	I am willing to acquire new knowledge for my betterment.	3.81	0.95
Average		**3.77**	**0.74**

In comparison to the average mean scores of the goal setting strategies and planning strategies, that of self-motivation was lower (M=3.77; SD=0.74). However, this figure indicates that the students employed self-motivation strategies frequently. More specifically, the most commonly-used self-motivation strategy was "ha[ving] a strong desire to achieve goals and succeed" (M=3.91; SD=0.84). The next items with quite a high level of frequency were "[being] willing to acquire new knowledge for my betterment" (M=3.81; SD=0.95) and "[being] willing to

learn new skills that will help me in my studying" (M=3.76; SD=0.94). The least frequently used self-motivation strategies consisted of "[being] open to criticism from other people about my studying" (M=3.69; SD=1.01) and "not [blaming] others for my studies" (M=3.68; SD=0.97). Based on the quantitative data, it shows that the students usually employed self-motivation strategies for their English learning.

Table 5. Help seeking strategies

No.	Help seeking	M	SD
29	I try to solve trouble learning the English material by myself first.	3.66	0.78
30	I ask the instructor to clarify concepts I don't understand well.	3.79	0.88
31	When I can't understand the material, I ask another student for help.	3.73	0.79
32	I try to identify students in this class whom I can ask for help if necessary.	3.69	0.87
	Average	**3.72**	**0.65**

As seen from Table 5, the average mean score indicates that the students' frequency to use help seeking strategies is relatively high (M=3.72; SD=0.65). Specifically, they usually asked the instructor to clarify concepts they did not understand well (M=3.79; SD=0.88). Besides, when they failed to grasp the material, they asked another student for help (M=3.73; SD=0.79). The students also applied the strategies of "try[ing] to identify students in this class whom I can ask for help if necessary" (M=3.69; SD=0.87) and "try[ing] to solve trouble learning the English material by myself first" (M=3.66; SD=0.78). Therefore, it is apparent that the students oftentimes employed the help seeking strategies to learn English.

Table 6. Self-monitoring strategies

No.	Self-monitoring	M	SD
24	I check how well I am doing when I solve a task.	3.60	0.83
25	I ask myself questions to stay on track as I do homework.	3.61	0.84
26	I judge the correctness of my studying.	3.64	0.84
27	I correct my mistakes in exercises.	3.70	0.91
28	I check my accuracy as I progress through a task.	3.73	0.87
Average		**3.66**	**0.70**

The average mean score of self-monitoring strategies illustrated in Table 6 highlights that these strategies are often used by the participants (M=3.66; SD=0.70). Particularly, the students generally checked their accuracy (M=3.73; SD=0.87) and corrected their mistakes (M=3.70; SD=0.91). Three more items were frequently conducted including "judg[ing] the correctness of my studying" (M=3.64; SD=0.84), "ask[ing] myself questions to stay on track as I do homework" (M=3.61; SD=0.84) and "check[ing] how well I am doing when I solve a task" (M=3.60; SD=0.83). To conclude, the students used self-monitoring strategies with quite high frequency.

Table 7. Flexible use of learning strategies

No.	Flexible use of learning strategies	M	SD
19	When I study English, I apply many different learning strategies.	3.76	0.80
20	I make lists of important terms for this course to memorize the lists.	3.22	1.19
21	I pull together information from different sources such as lectures, readings, and discussions.	3.81	0.73
22	I try to relate ideas in English to other subjects when possible.	3.59	0.85
23	I choose appropriate strategies for each task.	3.63	0.84
Average		**3.60**	**0.72**

It can be generally seen from Table 7, the students tended to apply learning strategies flexibly frequently (M=3.60; SD=0.72). Four of five items of flexible use of learning strategies are quite high. They comprised of pulling together information from different sources such as lectures, readings, and discussions (M=3.81; SD=0.73), applying many different learning strategies (M=3.76; SD=0.80), choose appropriate strategies for each task (M=3.63; SD=0.72) and trying to relate ideas in English to other subjects when possible (M=3.59; SD=0.85). However, "making lists of important terms for this course to memorize the lists" was sometimes applied by the students (M=3.22; SD=1.19). Although one of the five items achieved a low level of frequency, the average mean score of the five items indicates that students usually made flexible use of learning strategies.

Table 8. Attention control strategies

No.	Attention control	M	SD
14	My concentration is good even if there is music or noises in the room around me.	3.50	0.84
15	I am not easily distracted if there are people talking in the same room.	3.47	0.90
16	I can focus my attention so that I become unaware of what's going on in the room around me.	3.52	0.90
17	I try to coordinate my attention between the listening and writing required when taking notes during lectures.	3.72	0.84
18	I can easily shift my attention back to what I was doing before.	3.72	0.81
Average		**3.59**	**0.62**

The figures displayed in Table 8 above illustrate that the frequency of using attention control strategies for learning English is pretty high (M=3.59; SD=0.62). It indicates that the students usually applied the attention control strategies. Two strategies which shared the same mean score and were frequently employed by the students included "try[ing] to coordinate my attention between the listening and writing required when taking notes during lectures" (M=3.72; SD=0.84) and "[shifting] my attention back to what I was doing before" (M=3.72; SD=0.81), followed by "focus[ing] my attention so that I become unaware of what's going on in the room around me" (M=3.52; SD=0.90). Other items are "My concentration is good even if there is music or noises in the room around me" (M=3.50; SD=0.84) and "I can focus my attention so that I become unaware of what's going on in the room around me" (M=3.47; SD=0.90). It can be concluded that the attention control strategies were generally carried out.

Table 9. Self-evaluation

No.	Self-evaluation	M	SD
33	I double-check to make sure I did my homework right.	3.58	0.99
34	I check to see if my answers are correct.	3.52	0.94
35	I look back to see if I did the correct learning procedures.	3.61	0.90
36	I look back at the problem to see if my answer makes sense.	3.62	0.97
37	I rethink each learning step I have already done.	3.59	0.92
Average		**3.58**	**0.84**

As presented in Table 1, self-evaluation strategies achieved the lowest average mean score, i.e., the students used this category least (M=3.58; SD=0.84). Turning to the details, Table 9 shows that the students were likely to make use of strategies involving the review

process such as "look[ing] back at the problem to see if my answer makes sense" (M=3.62; SD=0.97) and "look[ing] back to see if I did the correct learning procedures" (M=3.61; SD=0.90). Furthermore, they tended to reconsider their learning steps (M=3.59; SD=0.92). The least frequently used strategies included "double-check[ing] to make sure I did my homework right" (M=3.58; SD=0.99) and "check[ing] to see if my answers are correct" (M=3.52; SD=0.94). To summarize, the self-evaluation strategies were used frequently by the high school students.

4.2. Discussion

The findings indicate that self-regulated learning strategies were employed frequently by the 12th graders in their English language learning. The results are similar to the findings of studies Tran and Tran (2021) [15] and Woottipong (2020) [14] that the high schools at the research sites often employed self-regulated learning strategies. The participants of the present study were in grade 12 who are supposed to study more vocabulary, grammar structures, and phrases in English to deal with examinations. The students, therefore, had to make an effort to improve English, and it is believed that using self-regulated learning strategies frequently is a good remedy for them. Tran and Duong (2013) [2] emphasized that student's achievement and attitudes toward the usefulness of English and English anxiety were proportional with employment of self-regulated learning strategies.

Of the eight categories of self-regulated learning strategies, the students had a tendency to use the goal setting strategies most, reaching the high overall mean score. This finding shows that applying goal setting strategies is essential for students when they learn English. The high frequency of employment self-regulated learning strategies of the 12 graders can be easily understood because according to Hoang (2010) [16], Vietnamese EFL students have to learn a huge amount of knowledge, and there are many tasks and tests that they have to prepare carefully. Moreover, English is one of

the compulsory subjects at school, so they are required to annually take an English exam for graduation. Goal setting strategies enable them to have a clear direction and objectives to improve their English language (Schunk, 2001) [17]. In contrast, the students showed their hesitation in conducting the self-evaluation strategies to learn English. Several researchers (Duong, 2015 [18]; Duong & Seepho, 2017 [19]; Duong, 2021 [20]) discovered that EFL students have found it hard to conduct self-assessment because of insufficient skills and knowledge though this skill is considered to be vital for life-long learning (Balçıkanlı, 2010 [21]; Gardner, 2000 [22]; Khodadady, 2012 [23]).

Additionally, other categories of strategies involving planning, self-motivation, help seeking, self-monitoring, flexible use of learning strategies, and attention control were frequently utilized by the participants. Similar to these findings, [24] found out that the non-English majors at a Ho Chi Minh City-based university used resource management strategies including help seeking, time management, and effort regulation at a high level. Several researchers ([4, 9, 12]) have pinpointed the impact of self-regulated learning strategies on learning outcomes. This can be the reason for the participants' high use of self-regulated learning strategies in general, and these strategies in particular in this study as they might find such strategies useful in their English learning.

5. Conclusion

The results of the quantitative research pointed out that participants usually used self-regulated learning strategies to study English. Among the eight categories of self-regulated learning strategies, the most frequent strategies employed by the students are goal setting strategies, followed by planning, self-motivation, help seeking, self-monitoring, flexible use of learning strategies, and attention control. It is noteworthy that self-evaluation strategies are the least frequent strategies that the students employed in their English learning

process. It is recommended that further research should collect qualitative data to delve into underlying reasons for the students' high use of self-regulated learning strategies. Additionally, the correlation between some factors such as their level of English proficiency, their self-study time, or their learning styles and their use of self-regulated learning strategies should be taken into consideration.

Some implications based on the findings of the study in relation to the employment self-regulated learning strategies are given. Firstly, it is necessary for high school students to be aware of the roles of self-regulated learning strategies as well as the effects of using self-regulated learning strategies for their English learning. Therefore, students can do self-regulated learning strategies proactively and frequently. Secondly, there should be more training courses for EFL teachers about self-regulated learning strategies and how to use self-regulated learning strategies effectively. This may provide the teachers with essential knowledge and skills of self-regulated learning strategies to facilitate their students' learning with effective learning strategies and encourage them to utilize self-regulated learning strategies properly. Besides, self-regulated learning strategies should be officially introduced to EFL students so that they are able to gain understanding of self-regulated learning strategies. Accordingly, they probably set up their timetable to regularly conduct learning strategies to improve their English.

With reference to limitations of the study, the study was carried out with quite a small sample size (i.e., 90 high school students), and the closed-ended questionnaire was used as the only instrument to collect the quantitative data. Therefore, it is recommended that the number of participants should be larger so that the findings can be generalized to other similar EFL contexts. Furthermore, more instruments such as interviews or observations should be conducted to ensure data triangulation.

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