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Investigating Self-efficacy and Self-regulated Learning Among Students of English Pedagogy

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Abstract

Self-efficacy and self-regulated learning are believed to be two variables contributing significantly to academic achievement across learning settings at higher education. The present study aims to investigate the levels of these two variables among teacher students of English pedagogy at a local university in Vietnam. These students comprise four groups of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. A mixed-method approach was applied in the present study. For quantitative data, a structured questionnaire was used to survey 314 target students. For qualitative data, 16 of them were interviewed individually for more information about sustained self-regulated learning activities, including the perceived role of sustained self-regulated learning over time, challenges faced, and strategies to sustain self-regulated learning consistently. The quantitative questionnaire results show that self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies among freshmen and sophomores are only at an upper average level, while those of juniors and seniors reach a high level. That significant difference in the two variables between the first two groups and the other two was confirmed by statistical SPSS tests. Accordingly, a tentative conclusion is that EFL teacher students need approximately two years' mastery experience at college to reach a high level in self-efficacy and self-regulated learning skills. However, interview results revealed that all interviewed students across the four groups appeared to acquire a decent knowledge about the role of sustaining SRL activities over time and specific strategies against related challenges and negative impacts from different factors. The results obtained provide several practical pedagogical recommendations and further research on issues under discussion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research shows that students with a high self-efficacy level are believed to exercise self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies and proactively survive challenges for sustained learning engagement rather than giving up (Bester, 2021; Bozbiyik et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025). In the field of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), self-efficacy and SRL strategies are even more important for learners to master the target language (Asrobi et al., 2025; Benson, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005). Many previous studies have reported positive correlations between EFL self-efficacy, SRL skills, and academic achievement (Asrobi et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025). In other words, self-efficacy and SRL strategies are significant predictors of academic achievement. Furthermore, constructively sustained SRL strategies will help mitigate the negative impact of stress, anxiety, irrational fears, setbacks, and frustration (Masten, 2018). It, therefore, makes a necessary sense for EFL teachers to capture and cultivate students' self-efficacy and SRL strategies so that students can overcome possible learning adversities, keep on learning consistently, and ultimately gain optimal learning outcome.

Still, few past studies examine self-efficacy and SRL strategies (embedded with learning resilience) among teacher students of English pedagogy within the current context of Vietnam. Thus, the present study attempts to fill this research gap. Accordingly, it aims to examine these two variables among English pedagogy students from the Vietnamese context, where EFL teaching career involves multiple challenges (e.g., large size classes, mixed levels of English proficiency among students, teaching method innovations, subject knowledge updated, and digitalization) and requires continual adaptations over the career discourse (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Phan & Truong, 2025; Thuy et al., 2025). Moreover, facilitating teacher students to build strong SRL skills and conducive strategies at college would create essential professional knowledge foundations for them to confidently fulfill the teaching career requirements set by MOET (2018) because these college-based learning skills are robustly inherent in and transferable to professional practices (Ben-Eliyahu, 2021; Hay & Reinders, 2018). Findings from this study will provide more theoretical insight into the topic under discussion while suggesting pedagogical directions in the EFL classroom practices. Accordingly, three key research questions are posed by this study: (1) What are the levels of self-efficacy and SRL among English pedagogy students? (2) What do these teacher students perceive benefits of sustained SRL consistently over time? (3) What typical challenges do they encounter while sustaining SRL consistently and regularly?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. *Self-efficacy Development in Education*

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is individual belief in their capability to complete a given task. That is, people will self-appraise, drawing on their perceptions, reliable skills, and strategies already earned. Therefore, it helps people to determine if they can perform the informed task in specific contexts; for instance, cooking a dinner meal for ten people, swimming 01 km long within 10 minutes, or finishing a 300-word essay in one hour. Students can develop their self-efficacy based on three keyways (Bandura, 2012) when it comes to learning environments. First, mastery experience is the primary source, where one has mastered the relevant knowledge and skills by getting involved in doing the given task several times. This aligns with the common sense "Practice makes perfect". Success gained allows for self-efficacy to be reinforced and developed. Thus, in EFL contexts, learners robustly need to earn valid knowledge about and be frequently exposed to the target language environment to experience this language in practical situations of communication. The second source for self-efficacy

built is social modeling (also known as vicarious learning). This takes place when students watch others doing similar tasks or hear of others' stories of success through consistent effort and resilience strategies. Psychologically, these inspiring stories could energize people to self-reflect and might come to the position of confidently moving forward by arguing that "others like me can do well, so can I" (Do, 2025). Meanwhile, social impact via verbal persuasion is the third source for self-efficacy strengthened. Sufficient support from others around (especially family members, teachers, and close friends) is believed to promote people to take further steps in doing given tasks (Asrobi et al., 2025). In this regard, Bong and Shaalvik (2003) argue that it is considered most effective when people who offer verbal persuasion are perceived as knowledgeable and credible. Thus, experienced teachers are advised to attend to verbal persuasion when in need (especially among struggling students or negative self-perceived ones) so that students could develop their self-efficacy cognitively over the learning process.

With a high level of self-efficacy, students are consciously motivated to mobilize all available resources optimally and take up a relevant course of strategic actions to meet the set goal/given task (Bandura, 1986). Accordingly, their pertinent self-regulation, progress monitoring, and sufficient resilience strategies are also activated until the given task is completed as required. On the contrary, at a low level of self-efficacy, students tend to seek causal attributions so that they would likely decline to take on the informed task (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). More importantly, such avoidance attitudes resulting from low efficacy among students will mostly impede their self-determination, continual effort, motivation, sustained learning strategies, and desirable learning performances (Waddington, 2023). Thus, it is advisable that educators and teachers should provide decent opportunity for students to develop their self-efficacy over their training program at college.

2.1.2. Self-regulated Learning Model

Self-regulated learning is the process whereby learners perform relevant thoughts, behaviors, and emotions navigated toward meeting the set goals of learning tasks (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Over this SRL process, learners are deemed to mobilize both internal and external resources to manage their learning behaviors effectively. Research has recorded several SRL models and roughly three levels of students' SRL: low, average, and high (Do, 2022/2025; Hirt et al., 2021; Lap et al., 2025; Malik & Parveen, 2019; Martínez-López, 2024; Panadero, 2017). In this regard, Zimmerman (2002) initiated a three-stage model of SRL: (1) forethought, (2) action, and (3) reflection.

The forethought stage is represented by learners' initial thoughts and inherent reasoning about goal setting, making action plans, strategies used, and outcome expected. Following the forethought, the action stage takes place when learners activate suitable strategies to execute and control their learning processes. Then, the reflection stage is present when they make self-evaluations on their learning outcomes and emotional experiences; thereby, planning next learning stages. Amini et al. (2020) argued that learners of strong SRL deploy different strategies, including motivational, emotional, and social dimensions for psychological wellness and learning achievement. Thus, educators underscore the necessity of training SRL for learners because "learners will gain the necessary knowledge and skills by being aware of their learning needs and have the potential to acquire 21st-century skills" (Karatas & Zeybek, 2020, p.35). Furthermore, Atcan Altan (2021) emphasized that "learners need to be ready to diagnose their own learning needs, set their own goals, pick appropriate learning strategies, and actively engage in their learning process" (p.298). It should be noted that these three primary stages are substantially interrelated and automatically recycled again alongside the SRL process sustained (Zimmerman et al., 2017). As a result, sustaining SRL activities give the way to mastery experience (Bandura, 2012).

One of the SRL strategies that catalyze learning achievement is resilience to sustain the self-learning process consistently and regularly. Resilience is basically defined as the process and outcome of strategies used to deal with tough life situations or unprecedented adversities through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptations upon environmental demands (APA, 2025). Thus, resilience denotes the presence of unexpected challenges or adversities. Then, it also indicates the human ability to cognitively recognize these adversities (including states of negative emotion) and control them by implementing suitable strategies or coping tactics in specific contexts (Asrobi et al., 2025). Under the systems theory, Masten (2018) denotes that resilience should not be taken as a singular or fixed trait because it stems from dynamic interplays of many inherent processes and systems. In educational contexts, learning resilience could be formed, activated, practiced, and cultivated over the life course. Upon the learning resilience growth over time, students are believed to intentionally adopt positive strategies against learning adversities, control negative emotion, and consistently keep on learning (de la Fuente et al., 2017). Furthermore, strong learning resilience is believed to facilitate mental health and confidence in students' potential and abilities (Alruwaili, 2025; Asrobi et al., 2025). Accordingly, for teacher students, learning resilience strategies formed and cultivated during student life are particularly important because they should be well prepared to deal with ups and downs in their career after graduation from college (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Phan & Truong, 2025; Thuy et al., 2025; Timperley, 2011).

As a result, while positive self-efficacy should be present upon taking on given tasks, the adequate presence of SRL embedded with resilience will likely ensure the completion of the given task despite possible challenges and adversities. That is why these two variables are closely interrelated in operation and crucial predictors of sustained learning engagement and academic achievement across learning contexts, including EFL (Asrobi et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; de la Fuente et al., 2017; Do, 2025). On such a close interrelation between the two concerned variables, previous EFL-driven studies have been recorded by the literature in one way or another over the past years in Vietnam and other countries as seen below.

2.2. Previous Studies

Research on self-efficacy and SRL in EFL education has been conducted across countries. For instance, researching the relationship between SRL and English reading skills in Iran, Amini et al. (2020) showed that students of higher scores in SRL scored higher on the reading tests. Meanwhile, in Peru, Torres et al. (2023) indicated a positive impact of students' self-efficacy and achievement in English reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Polrak et al. (2023) in Thailand also recorded the participants' English performances associated with their academic self-efficacy. In the same line, after a 16-week intervention of self-efficacy improvement applied to 102 EFL students in China, Li et al. (2023) found that the students' language mindset was positively reframed, SRL strategies were enhanced, and resilience was developed. In the same line, the study by Huang (2024) documented a positive correlation between achievement English skills (in listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and self-efficacy among EFL undergraduates from Taiwan; thereby, the study underscored the significant role of the self-efficacy variable as one of the predictors in English learning success. Also, a pertinent study by Lin et al. (2025) involving EFL learners from China showed a positive correlation between participants' English-speaking self-efficacy and their English learning motivation. Also, a review study conducted by Chen et al. (2025) across countries indicates that EFL resilience learners exhibited their persistence in learning by adaptive SRL strategies to cope with challenges and adversities. These learners also built good relationships with others so that support from other people helped them quickly recover from negative emotions.

In Vietnam, with a 9-week intervention on English writing skills, Truong (2022) found that the involved EFL second-year students enhanced their self-efficacy in English writing skills and SRL. Another empirical study by Luu and Truong (2024) via the questionnaire and English-speaking test showed that there was a positive impact of self-efficacy on 203 university students' English-speaking performance and that these students' self-efficacy was partly built on their mastery experience. A recent study by Do (2025) among 400 English-major students from a university reported that the involved students' self-efficacy was positively correlated with their SRL and resilience; however, the students' resilience was at a high level while their SRL and self-efficacy were only at the upper-average. Likewise, Lap et al. (2025) surveyed 150 undergraduate students majoring in English and noticed that the participants displayed an average level of resilience and had to face several challenges, including coursework overload and lack of self-regulation.

Overall, previous studies underline the essential presence of self-efficacy and SRL (with resilience strategies included) in the process of EFL learning. However, the mixed findings as seen above across studies suggest that students generally vary in being aware of these two interrelated variables and proactively deploy them at different levels in specific learning contexts and college experience mastery. Thus, further research on these two variables under diverse contexts in EFL education in Vietnam and beyond should be done so that more insight is gained; thereby, EFL teacher students in specific learning settings can be equipped with useful knowledge and valid skills related to the two variables over their learning pathway to become an English teacher after college graduation.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research design and Participants

The present study involved both empirically quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed-methods approach was aimed at gaining better relevant evidence than that from only the quantitative or qualitative one (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Accordingly, for the quantitative data, a structured questionnaire was used to capture shared patterns across all the participants. These quantitative results were collected to provide the valid answer to the first research question raised above. Meanwhile, a semi-interview survey based on individual cases was administrated to provide qualitative answers for the second and third research questions. Additionally, it helped clarify some points captured in the questionnaire results for the present study.

The participants are 314 EFL teacher students from a single university in Vietnam. However, they come from different provinces of Vietnam. Their ages range from 19 to 22. They include 117 freshmen (33 males, 84 females), 54 sophomores (15 males, 39 females), 69 juniors (22 males, 47 females), and 74 seniors (21 males, 53 females). They share Vietnamese as their first language and aim to become EFL teachers after finishing their 4-year training program at this university, where the present study was conducted. One of the key learning outcomes targeted by this training program is SRL competence (for more information about the training program's learning outcomes, see at www.dthu.edu.vn/gioi-thieu-nganh.aspx?id=267). The present study argues that SRL competence plays a key role in not just positively influencing college achievement among these teacher students but also it will likely contribute enormously to their future career as EFL teachers in the Vietnamese context (MOET, 2018).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Structured Questionnaire

Basing on the literature review addressed above, particularly from the study by Do (2025), the current researcher designed a structured questionnaire encompassing 30 items (which aimed to provide

the answer to the first research question). Each item was structured with five options for the involved respondents to select from. This 5-point scale options were structured with 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=No idea, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly agree, respectively. Accordingly, the present study applied the 5-point rating (Do, 2025) as follows: from 1 < 3.00 points are rated as a low level; 3.00 < 4.00 is average, and between 4.00 and 5.00 as a high level. For detailed content, apart from some items related to demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and college year), this questionnaire covered two broad sections with 30 items (see for full detail below). The first section contained 15 items, which were jointly indicative of participants' self-efficacy level. The next 15 items in the second half of the questionnaire were used to measure participants' level of SRL.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interview

Since it aimed to explore more insights (based on qualitative data) into sustaining SRL strategies used by participants as well as perceived benefits and challenges, the interview included five open-ended questions (as a semi-structured format). These open-ended questions allowed individual participants to speak out their varied ideas, opinions, and comments as many as possible (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These open-ended questions were: (1) What do you think about the role of sustaining English self-learning at college? (2) What are the benefits of sustained self-learning? (3) What challenges have you encountered in sustaining self-learning consistently and regularly? (4) What are your specific strategies of sustaining self-learning? (5) What is more important for sustaining self-learning, internal or external factors? This question set was approved by an EFL expert and piloted among 10 students from the researched population before it was used for the main survey.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The structured questionnaire was first reviewed by the EFL expert (as mentioned above) for its relevant content, wording, and item ordering. Then, it was piloted for its validity, clarity, and readability among 50 students from the same population. After the pilot, some revisions in wording and ordering were made; and then, the questionnaire was used in the main survey. Upon the university's approval and the Dean's permission, the researcher contacted the target students in the classroom during the breaktime. In these classes, the students were informed in detail about the purpose of the survey and the questionnaire content. The researcher also clearly explained that participation in this survey was optional and had nothing to do with any grade courses. Also, real names were unknown in any case. The students completed the questionnaire responses right in the classroom. It took them around 15 minutes to do the task.

After one week's working at the research site, the researcher collected 314 returned questionnaire sheets. These sheets were then computed using the software SPSS 26 (Statistic Package of Social Sciences) to calculate the scale reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), and descriptive statistics, including score means (M) and standard deviation (SD) across the sample size. These numeric results would give the way to further analysis and interpretation related to the first research question on the levels of self-efficacy and SRL. Additionally, statistical comparisons among the four groups (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) were conducted for any possible significant differences.

Then, the researcher randomly invited 16 students from the same population to participate in the interview survey. It aimed to involve 4 students, each representing the four groups (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors), respectively. Upon the students' participation consent, the individual interviews were administered on a case-by-case format in the classroom at this university. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes. At the interview session, the students were briefed about the aim, format, and open-ended question set asked by the researcher. They also understood that their responses

were used in the present study on an anonymity principle (i.e., no real name was given in any case). With the students' permission, all the interview procedure was audio-recorded in a digital device for later analysis and checking. This was used as the qualitative data to provide the relevant answers for the second and third research questions on participants' SRL strategies applied. Thereby, following the verbatim step from the audio-recordings, coding was done. It included three key steps (Flick, 2018): (1) scrutinizing relevant data and coding items related to SRL construct in general terms, (2) grouping codes identified into SRL issues as themes based on SRL strategies, benefits, and challenges, (3) making interpretations and quotations attached on each theme with specific reference to SRL strategies, benefits, and challenges. The researcher did all these coding steps manually and then the raw interview recordings and coding results were sent to the EFL expert for double-checking. Some disagreements on coding between the researcher and the expert were resolved to reach a complete agreement on all related issues.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Quantitative Results from the Questionnaire

First, the collected questionnaire data were computed using SPSS to check the entire questionnaire scale's reliability. This test's result shows in Table 1 that Alpha (α) and standardized items-based Alpha (α) are 0.924 and 0.925, respectively. Thus, the scale has a high reliability level (far high above an acceptable level of 0.700) (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Reliability Statistics of the Entire Questionnaire Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.924	0.925	30

4.1.1. Measuring participants' self-efficacy

Next, to measure the self-efficacy level, a descriptive statistic test was conducted across 15 items related to self-efficacy structured in the first half of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Self-efficacy Items (N=314)

Items	Mean	SD
01. I believe I can achieve my set goals in English learning at college to become an English teacher after graduation	3.53	0.891
02. I can learn English successfully if I try my best to become an English teacher in the future as desired.	4.20	0.752
03. I can learn English successfully by developing my own strengths in language learning.	3.98	0.726
04. I believe that I can overcome all difficulties in English learning.	3.69	0.837
05. I can keep on learning consistently despite encountering many challenges.	3.75	0.923
06. I must succeed in English learning at college because it is very important for my career development as an English teacher.	4.73	0.498
07. I believe that success in English learning will bring good opportunities to my future career as an English teacher, which has created my confidence in learning.	4.64	0.536
08. I know my weak points in English learning and continually attempt to improve them to become a good English teacher in the future.	4.13	0.647
09. I have overcome many challenges in English learning over the past years.	4.01	0.692
10. I have managed to continue English learning even though at some points I felt doubt about my ability to become a good English teacher in the future.	3.95	0.759
11. I have developed ways of sustained self-learning in my English learning now and being an English teacher in the future.	4.09	0.705

Items	Mean	SD
12. I have been able to control negative emotions when facing challenges in the learning processes.	3.59	0.898
13. I have learned good lessons from other people around me to deal with difficulties in English learning confidently and persistently.	4.14	0.603
14. I accept setbacks in English learning because I can learn a lot from these setbacks to improve myself.	4.30	0.594
15. I must keep on English learning until reaching the set goals.	3.78	0.827
Sum Mean	4.03	0.436

The sum mean from 15 items ($M=4.03$ out of 5 points with a small $SD\ 0.436 < 0.50$) in Table 2 indicates that self-efficacy among the participants just reaches a high level. However, the score means on 7 items (01, 03, 04, 05, 10, 12, 15) are only at the upper-average level (i.e., below 4.0 points). Remarkably, the two items 06 ($M=4.73$, $SD=0.498$) and 07 ($M=4.64$, $SD=0.536$) top the list, which suggest that these EFL teacher students were robustly aware of the importance of success in English learning with an English teaching career in their mind. Another source for their self-efficacy was represented by items 09, 10, 11, and 12, which are all related to mastery experience (mastery experience). They also appeared to learn from others' examples decoded as social modeling (item 13) and create resilience quite confidently (items 14, 15).

To explore more possible significant differences among the four groups of participants (i.e., freshmen coded as Year I, sophomores Year II, juniors Year III, and seniors Year IV), Independent-Samples T-tests were done. The results are presented below.

Table 3. Independent-Samples T-tests on Self-efficacy Levels

Year	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	
I	118	3.843	0.4344			
II	53	3.939	0.3854			
III	69	4.204	0.3785			
IV	74	4.246	0.3677			
Compare means				I & II	-0.0961	0.066
				I & III	-0.3613	0.000*
				I & IV	-0.4033	0.000*
				II & III	-0.2652	0.000*
				II & IV	-0.3072	0.000*
				III & IV	-0.0420	0.502

Table 3 displays that the mean slightly increases from Year I to Year IV ($3.843 < 3.939 < 4.204 < 4.246$, respectively). It also shows that Year I and Year II have yet to reach a high level while the other two just entered the high-level line. In addition, because the Sig. values of I & II ($=0.066$) and III & IV ($=0.502$) are greater than 0.01, the mean differences (-0.0961 , -0.0420) in these two compared cases are not statistically significant while the other cases are significant with Sig. values < 0.01 (Hair et al., 2019). In other words, the self-efficacy of Year I & Year II is only at the upper average level while that of Year III and Year IV reaches a high level. Thus, this matches the theory of mastery experience (Bandura, 2012), which anchors on relevant practices for accumulating English-majored learning experiences and building inherent self-efficacy. Furthermore, it explicitly displays the positively gradual increase in this variable built over the college training trajectory.

Based on that result, it also implies that EFL students essentially need at least two years of training full-time at college to significantly build their learning self-efficacy up to a high level. This finding on the correlation between mastery experience and self-efficacy makes the present study stand out from relevant previous studies from Vietnam (Do, 2025; Luu & Truong, 2024; Truong, 2022) when it comes to measuring learners' self-efficacy in the success of EFL learning at college, especially among EFL teacher students. In other words, no similar finding has been reported by previous pertinent studies conducted so far in Vietnam. For instance, Do (2025) only measured and reported an upper average level of self-efficacy across English-majored students of four groups (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors). More importantly, this new finding implicates that freshmen should make greater effort in learning for mastery experience accumulated so that their self-efficacy would confidently move up to reach a high level when entering the second year or so rather than until the third one. This is meaningful because self-efficacy positively impacts academic performances and learning success (Bandura, 2012; Chen et al., 2025; Huang, 2024; Polrak et al, 2023). Also, teachers and school units in charge should pay more attention to providing conducive support in this regard.

4.1.2. Measuring Participants' Self-regulated Learning (SRL) Level

Similarly, to measure participants' SRL level, a descriptive statistic test was conducted across 15 items structured in the second half of the questionnaire scale.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of SRL Items (N=314)

Items	Mean	SD
16. I set the goals for my English learning about knowledge and skills to gain at college.	4.23	0.714
17. I make action plans to meet my set goals in English learning to become an English teacher.	4.18	0.681
18. I always stick to my set goals in English learning.	3.88	0.822
19. I know how to regulate my time to complete learning tasks in due time.	3.75	0.837
20. I know how to diversify learning methods for better outcome.	3.72	0.745
21. I know how to adapt myself to different learning situations.	3.97	0.714
22. I keep on learning actively even though I have no required assignment to complete.	3.87	0.807
23. I frequently self-evaluate my English learning methods for better results.	3.70	0.812
24. I will maintain a positive perspective even though my English learning appears not to make progress as expected.	3.84	0.845
25. Encountering challenges, I will find ways to handle them instead of giving up.	4.34	0.594
26. I always motivate myself to keep on sustained English learning.	4.21	0.717
27. I will go to my friends for support when in need.	3.95	0.874
28. I will consult teachers when facing challenges in English learning.	4.11	0.796
29. My family always provides me with learning forces, especially when I meet difficulties.	4.34	0.699
30. I now know how to deploy different learning resources, especially digital ones.	4.16	0.767
Sum Mean	4.01	0.456

With the sum mean 4.01 (SD=0.456), participants' SRL is just at a high level. There are seven items (16, 17, 25, 26, 28, 29, and 30) reaching the high level. Still, eight items (18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 27) only stand at the upper-average level.

Accordingly, at the forethought stage (Zimmerman et al., 2017), the participants appeared to be very strong in setting goals (item 16, M=4.23) and making action plans (item 17, M=4.18). Yet, at the

action stage, they did not always finish their set goals (item 18, $M=3.88$) mostly because they failed to manage time well (item 19), to diversify learning methods (item 20), and adapt themselves to different learning situations effectively (item 21). At the reflection stage, they did not frequently exercise self-evaluation (item 23). It is, however, pleasing that they deployed different learning resources, especially digital ones (item 30). They also used resilience strategies (item 24, 25, 26) decently and sought support from teachers, friends, and especially family when in need. Among the three available sources of support, family took the dominant role ($M=4.34$). This indicates the common trend of Vietnamese students in general, who gain significant learning motivation from their families.

Examining the effect of mastery experience on SRL levels among the four groups of participants (Year I, II, III, and IV), Independent-Samples T-tests were done. The results are found below.

Table 5. Independent-Samples T-tests on SRL Levels

Year	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
I	118	3.8362	0.4335		
II	53	3.8264	0.3621		
III	69	4.2145	0.3678		
IV	74	4.2541	0.4483		
Compare means			I & II	0.0997	0.879
			I & III	-.3783	0.000*
			I & IV	-.4179	0.000*
			II & III	-.3880	0.000*
			II & IV	-.4276	0.000*
			III & IV	-.0395	0.564

The T-tests from Table 5 show that two compared mean cases of I & II (Sig. value= $0.879 > 0.01$) and III & IV (Sig. value= $0.564 > 0.01$) produce no statistically significant difference (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the other cases with Sig. value < 0.01 make significant differences. As a result, it can be tentatively concluded that mastery experience of EFL learning at college among participants appears to positively impact their SRL significantly only after two years' full-time learning. This finding has not been explicitly reported in relevant past studies (Amini et al., 2020; Do, 2025; Lap et al., 2025; Truong, 2022) regarding EFL learning among undergraduates. As a result, it makes a marked sense on pedagogical issues here: classroom teachers should consciously facilitate students to enhance their SRL skills right at the first year so that sophomores' SRL has mostly reached a high level. Then, sophomores should be continually supported in this regard so that by the end of the second year, their SRL skills firmly reach a high level. By that way, by the end of the fourth year, their SRL skills should be at an upper high level. This is significant because as discussed above SRL and learning outcomes are positively correlated (Asrobi et al., 2025; Atcan Altan, 2021; Chen et al, 2025). In other words, once SRL knowledge and skills have been enhanced, academic performances would likely be increased (serving as the quantitative evidence for learning outcome improved).

4.2. Qualitative Results from Interviews

As addressed earlier, the interview survey involved 16 students, including 4 freshmen (coded St-1, St-2, St-3, and St-4), 4 sophomores (St-5 to St-8), 4 juniors (St-9 to St-12), and 4 seniors (St-13 to St-16). The next section presents the interview results qualitatively based on three specific themes as follows.

4.2.1. Theme 1- Perceived Role of Sustaining SRL Activities

It is gratifying to see that all 16 interviewed students were fully aware of the important role of sustaining SRL at college. They all understood that it should be performed daily for long-term periods: “I think self-learning must be done every day, continually without interruption” (S13, S14, S4, etc.). They also knew that sustaining self-learning every day would benefit them in several ways. First, it would reinforce what has been learnt about the English language knowledge and skills. These include facilitating to “use English skills better, step and step over time, which will form kind of our belonging and identity in learning the target language” (S9), “learn English more easily and better when self-learning activities are consistently sustained”(S10), “acquire more English vocabulary and communicate in English more quickly and simultaneously” (S12), “complete assignments in due times as required by teachers, which will provide more confidence in the classroom sessions” (S7), and “improve natural English communication skills, feeling more comfortable and less pressured, and finally improving my English proficiency” (S1) as well as “make me feel more confident when using English. I feel more comfortable speaking in class or talking with my foreign friends on the digital platform.” (S4).

Beyond anchoring on the positive impacts on elevating English language proficiency as a target identity of being EFL-majored students as seen above, the interviewed students also recognized that sustaining SRL paid the way to self-establishing an essential habit and becoming self-disciplined in learning activities: “Self-studying English helps us become more self-disciplined in learning” (S2), “Maintaining this habit helps develop a sense of self-discipline” (S3), and “It will motivate me to learn English every day at college and even later in my career as being an English teacher” (S16). In this regard, S8 argued that “When self-learning becomes a well-established habit, I feel mostly free from any stress or pressure in learning activities daily.”

Accordingly, all the interviewees clearly showed their strong cognition about the significance of sustaining SRL activities over time. This qualitative finding is in line with the quantitative result addressed above, where the SRL level across the four groups is at a high level. However, theme-1 data found no significant difference among the four groups. In another sense, theme-1 data matches the necessary presence of the forethought stage represented by Zimmerman et al. (2017)’s model of SRL activities. Additionally, the finding about these students’ sufficient emphasis on establishing a self-disciplined habit of sustaining SRL activities is insightful in the present study with reference to those previous studies on the topic under discussion (Amini et al., 2020; Do, 2025; Lap et al., 2025; Truong, 2022), where self-sustaining SRL activities boosting to establish this significant habit have not been reported. Based on this finding, it suggests that teachers should remind students to maintain SRL activities consistently and effectively until it really becomes a self-disciplined habit while still at college. Thereby, it could possibly be transferred across college life later since these students are all EFL teacher students.

4.2.2. Theme 2 - Faced Challenges on Sustaining SRL Activities

For theme 2, all the interviewees admitted that they found it challenging to sustain SRL activities as planned. They cited three major sources of SRL activities incomplete on a daily learning basis. First, it is the impacts of the external factors: “Without teachers’ monitoring, my self-learning activities are easily distracted by something more interesting such as surfing the internet for various updated information or joining the Facebook platform” (S14), “I am usually tempted to use my smart phone carried with most of the time, unconsciously resulting in interrupting my self-learning” (S15), and

“There are days when I’m very busy with something else and can’t spend as much time on self-learning English as I have planned” (S4). Secondly, it comes from personal issues impeding SRL activities: “Feeling bored, shortage of energy for learning, and losing strong determination and commitment to sustaining self-learning for long terms consistently” (S13), “losing motivation, procrastinating, and going out with friends for fun” (S8), and “I lack a strong resilience upon unexpected setbacks or poor marks on my learning results” (S9). Thirdly, scaffolding is not present when in need, for instance: “For me, the biggest problem is that I can’t find clear sources of materials or people to communicate with on English learning issues” (S2), “I don’t get immediate feedback on what I have learnt or what is the correct answer”(S3), “When I study English by myself, I feel that I lack someone to guide me directly, correct my mistakes, and keep me motivated. Without a companion or supervision, I easily lose focus and give up” (S11), and “I don’t have enough materials suitable for self-learning such as subtitled English videos. I need these videos so that I could learn new English vocabulary and understand the content better” (S4).

Theme-2 reports appear to match the quantitative results on the action stage (referring to Table 4). Although knowing the importance of sustaining SRL and planning actions for the set goals (items 16, 17 self-rated at a high level), all interviewed students somehow failed to maintain SRL activities consistently (items 18, 19, 20 only at the upper-average level) due to the external impacts, personal issues, and insufficient support. However, on the third source of faced challenges, theme-2 data remarks a dominant need for scaffolding among freshmen (S2, 3, 4). In other words, freshmen somehow faced a negative feeling of uncertainty about the validity of learning materials and corrective feedback on their learning activities. This finding indicates that freshmen need more mastery experience (Bandura, 2012), especially decent critical skills on selecting learning materials and self-assessing learning outcome. Accordingly, for students’ SRL activities well-sustained on long terms, continual support from in-charge teachers and relevant school units should be underscored. Teachers in charge should provide specific guidance on selecting suitable materials (especially digital ones like subtitled videos on relevant topics) and effective learning methods to ensure SRL functioning in the right way rather than being strayed.

4.2.3. Theme 3 - Strategies on Sustaining SRL Activities

One point unanimously agreed by all the interviewed students is that self-elements play a primary role in sustaining SRL activities. For instance, “I think internal factors are the key to maintaining English self-learning because we need to have a positive spirit and a strong desire to keep up our motivation and language practice over time. Thereby, we can perform non-stop self-learning despite unfavorable conditions” (S1), “Self-discipline must be present to drive me to sustain self-learning” (S8), and “Self-discipline, sufficient effort, and persistent resilience in the face of adversities determine the sustained self-learning over time” (S11).

For concrete strategies on sustaining English self-learning, the students outlined: “Collaborative learning with peers will provide better motivation for self-learning” (S9), “We must have specific goals such as gaining 7.0 points in IELTS and thereby, we know what we need to do to reach the set goals” (S10), “We must manage our time appropriately to complete what we need to do” (S6), and “I will make a plan, write a timetable that fits, create a learning environment with better exposure to English communication, and motivate myself, set deadlines, and give myself penalties if I procrastinate” (S2). Some students referred to using different learning methods, especially digital resources, for better engagement and effectiveness (S1, S5, S9, etc.).

So, from the involved students' perspective on theme-3, cognitive strategies (including being self-disciplined, self-motivated, and resilient) must be rigorously applied for SRL activities sustained over the learning process. Then, action strategies include identifying specific needs, setting relevant goals, and making appropriate plans scheduled for practical operations with the set goals in mind. In general terms, these strategies (both cognitive and operative) are all basically embedded in the SRL model (Zimmerman et al., 2017) and relevant issues on mastery experience and self-efficacy built (Bandura, 1986/2012). In addition, these SLR-based strategies are perceived equally by the four groups, i.e., there is no significant difference among them on theme-3. More importantly, once these strategies have been firmly established during student life, EFL teacher students (like those participants in the present study) are believed to confidently fulfill their teaching functions and skillfully deal with adversities (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Phan & Truong, 2025; Thuy et al., 2025) in their future career as EFL teachers in the Vietnamese context (MOET, 2018).

5. CONCLUSION

Firstly, the quantitative results based on a structured-questionnaire survey have documented that there was a significant difference in self-efficacy and SRL levels among the four groups of English-major teacher students involved in the present study. It clearly shows that the levels of self-efficacy and SRL among EFL juniors and seniors reached a lower high level while those of freshmen and sophomores were scored only at an upper average. This tentatively serves as a new finding by the present study. *Secondly*, the qualitative data via individual semi-structured interviews uncovered that all interviewed students appeared to acquire a decent knowledge about the role of sustaining SRL activities over time and specific strategies against related challenges and negative impacts from different factors.

Although basically providing pertinent answers to the set research questions and some new findings addressed earlier in comparison to those previous ones in the research line, the present study suffers from three key limitations: (i) not a very large sample (only 314 participants) obtained, (ii) all data, both quantitative and qualitative, are only self-reported by participants, which lack some kind of objective evidence like in-charge teachers' documents and evaluations; (iii) no empirical data on SRL practices were collected. Thus, further research on the issues concerned is encouraged. These include testing the new findings recorded in the present study, involving EFL teachers for objective evaluations, and collecting empirical data on SRL practices behind the classroom in particular.

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