

EXPLORING SELF-REGULATED WRITING STRATEGIES AMONG NON-ENGLISH MAJOR EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study explored the use of self-regulated writing strategies among non-English major students in an EFL context and examined their relationship with writing ability. Using a questionnaire and an open-ended question, data were collected from 95 students. The results showed that students reported high use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies, but their writing ability was only at a moderate level. Correlation analysis revealed weak to moderate positive relationships between strategy use and writing ability, with evaluating strategies showing the strongest association. Qualitative findings indicated that students faced difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and idea development, suggesting that strategies may not be applied effectively. The study highlights the need to improve the quality of strategy use to enhance writing performance.

Keywords: self-regulated learning, non-English majors, writing performance

I. Introduction:

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most important skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, since it enables learners to express ideas, demonstrate knowledge, and communicate effectively in academic contexts (Hyland, 2003). However, writing is also considered one of the most challenging skills, particularly for learners who are not majoring in English. For non-English major students, writing in English often presents multiple difficulties, such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and lack of idea organization (Fareed et al., 2016). Many students tend to focus primarily on surface-level features, especially grammar, while neglecting higher-level processes such as planning and revision. As a result, their overall writing performance remains limited. To better understand how students manage the writing process, the concept of self-regulated learning (SRL) has received increasing attention. According to Zimmerman (2002), SRL refers to learners' ability to actively control their learning processes through planning, monitoring, and evaluating

their performance. In the context of writing, SRL strategies help learners organize ideas, monitor their progress during writing, and reflect on their work after completion.

Although previous studies have examined SRL in language learning, much of the research has focused on English majors or high-proficiency learners (Teng & Zhang, 2016). There is still limited research exploring how non-English major students employ self-regulated writing strategies, particularly in EFL contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of self-regulated writing strategies among non-English major students in an EFL context and examine how these strategies relate to students' self-perceived writing ability. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions

1. What self-regulated writing strategies do non-English major EFL students use?
2. Which types of strategies (planning, monitoring, evaluating) are most and least frequently used?
3. Is there a relationship between self-regulated writing strategies and students' self-perceived writing ability?

II. Literature review

2.1. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a key concept in educational psychology, referring to learners' active participation in their own learning processes. Zimmerman (2002) defines SRL as the degree to which learners are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active in their learning. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, self-regulated learners set goals, monitor their progress, and evaluate their outcomes.

SRL is commonly conceptualized as involving three main phases: planning, monitoring, and evaluating. During the planning phase, learners set goals and select appropriate strategies. In the monitoring phase, they track their performance and make adjustments as needed. In the evaluating phase, learners reflect on their outcomes and identify areas for improvement (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). These processes are essential for effective learning across various domains.

2.2. Self-regulated learning in Writing

In the context of writing, SRL plays a crucial role due to the complex and recursive nature of the writing process. Writing requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to generate ideas, organize content, and revise drafts (Hyland, 2003).

Planning strategies in writing include brainstorming ideas, outlining, and setting goals for the text. Monitoring strategies involve checking grammar, vocabulary, and coherence in writing. Evaluating strategies refer to reviewing and revising the text after completion. Students who effectively employ these strategies are more likely to produce well-organized and coherent writing (Teng & Zhang, 2016).

However, research has shown that many EFL learners tend to rely heavily on monitoring strategies, particularly grammar checking, while underutilizing planning and evaluating strategies (Raofi & Maroofi, 2017). This imbalance may limit their overall writing development and prevent them from achieving higher levels of writing proficiency.

2.3. Previous studies:

A growing body of research has investigated the role of self-regulated learning (SRL) in second language writing, with consistent evidence suggesting that SRL strategies contribute positively to writing performance. Teng & Zhang (2016) examined the multidimensional nature of SRL strategies among EFL learners and found that students who actively engaged in planning and evaluation strategies tended to produce higher-quality writing. Their study highlights the importance of strategy use beyond surface-level monitoring.

Similarly, Bai et al. (2014) explored the relationship between self-regulated writing strategies and writing performance among primary school students in an ESL context. Their findings indicated that planning and revising strategies were strong predictors of writing quality. However, unlike Teng & Zhang (2016), who focused on older learners, Bai et al. (2014) examined younger students, suggesting that SRL strategies are beneficial across different age groups.

In contrast, (Raofi et al., 2012) emphasized the role of self-efficacy as a key component of self-regulated learning. Their study found that students with higher confidence in their writing ability were more likely to use a wider range of SRL strategies. While this study provides valuable insight into the psychological aspects of SRL, it focuses more on affective factors rather than specific strategy use in writing processes.

Another relevant study by Sun & Wang (2020) investigated SRL strategies in online EFL writing contexts. Their findings showed that students relied heavily on monitoring strategies, particularly grammar checking, while underutilizing planning and revising strategies. This imbalance is consistent with other studies and suggests that many learners focus on surface-level accuracy rather than deeper writing processes.

Despite these contributions, most existing studies share several limitations. First, many focus on English majors or high-proficiency learners (Sun & Wang, 2020; Teng & Zhang, 2016), which may not reflect the experiences of non-English major students. Second, while some studies highlight the importance of planning and evaluating strategies, learners often demonstrate an overreliance on monitoring strategies, indicating an imbalance in SRL use. Third, relatively few studies examine the relationship between SRL strategies and students' self-perceived writing ability, which may provide additional insight into learners' writing development.

Therefore, there is a need for further research that focuses specifically on non-English major EFL students and examines both their use of self-regulated writing strategies and their perceived writing competence. Addressing this gap may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how different groups of learners regulate their writing processes.

III. Methodology:

3.1. Research design:

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the use of self-regulated writing strategies among non-English major EFL students. A questionnaire was used to collect data on students' use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies, as well as their self-perceived writing ability. The design also included one open-ended question to provide additional insights into students' perceived difficulties in English writing.

3.2. Participants:

The participants of the study were non-English major undergraduate students at a university in Vietnam. A total of 95 students participated in the study.

The participants were all first-year students coming from different majors. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality.

3.3. Instrument

Data were collected by a self-report questionnaire developed based on the concept of self-regulated learning proposed by Zimmerman (2002)'s SRL model.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 items divided into four sections:

- Planning strategies (7 items): measuring students' use of strategies before writing (e.g., planning ideas, outlining, setting goals)
- Monitoring strategies (7 items): measuring strategies used during writing (e.g., checking grammar, monitoring clarity)

- Evaluating strategies (7 items): measuring strategies used after writing (e.g., revising, reviewing content)
- Self-perceived writing ability (4 items): measuring students' confidence and perceived competence in writing

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, the questionnaire included:

- Demographic questions (gender, year of study, major)
- One open-ended question asking students to describe the difficulties they encounter when writing in English

The questionnaire was first reviewed to ensure clarity and appropriateness for non-English major students. Minor wording adjustments were made to improve comprehension.

3.4. Data collection

The data were collected using an online questionnaire (Google Forms). The survey link was distributed to students through class groups on Zalo (an application). All the questions used in the survey were translated in both English and the participants' first language Vietnamese to avoid misunderstanding. The survey was conducted right after students practicing their writing task including a film review and a formal letter.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain anonymous and used only for research purposes. The data collection process took place over a period of 2 weeks.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via Excel.

- Quantitative analysis:

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated to examine the overall use of self-regulated writing strategies and to identify which types of strategies were most and least frequently used.

Mean scores were computed for each category:

- o Planning
- o Monitoring
- o Evaluating

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between self-regulated writing strategies and students' self-perceived writing ability.

- Qualitative support (open-ended question): Responses to the open-ended question were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, in which responses were coded and grouped into recurring themes.
- Selected responses were used as supporting evidence in the Discussion section.

3.6. Reliability:

To ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each section:

- Planning strategies
- Monitoring strategies
- Evaluating strategies
- Writing ability

A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

3.7. Ethical considerations:

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. No personal identifying information was collected.

IV. Results:

4.1. Descriptive statistics:

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' self-regulated writing strategies and their self-perceived writing ability.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Self-Regulated Writing Strategies and Writing Ability

Variable	Mean (M)	SD
Planning	3.77	0.67
Monitoring	3.67	0.63
Evaluating	3.74	0.65
Writing Ability	2.62	0.67

Among the three types of self-regulated writing strategies, planning strategies had the highest mean score ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.67$), followed closely by evaluating strategies ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.65$), while monitoring strategies had the lowest mean score ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.63$).

Overall, the results indicate that students reported a high level of use of all three types of self-regulated writing strategies. However, their self-perceived writing ability was only at a moderate

level ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.67$). This suggests that although students are aware of and report using self-regulated writing strategies, this does not necessarily translate into a high level of perceived writing ability.

4.2. Correlation Between SRL Strategies and Writing Ability

Table 2 shows the correlation between self-regulated writing strategies and students' self-perceived writing ability.

Table 2: Correlations between Self-Regulated Writing Strategies and Writing Ability

Variable	1	2	3	4
Planning	-			
Monitoring		-		
Evaluating			-	
Writing Ability	.283	.306	.385	-

**Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients (r)*

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that all three types of self-regulated writing strategies were positively correlated with writing ability. Specifically, planning showed a weak positive correlation with writing ability ($r = 0.283$), monitoring showed a low to moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.306$), and evaluating showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.385$).

These results suggest that students who use self-regulated writing strategies more frequently tend to report higher levels of writing ability.

4.3. Open-Ended Results

To complement the quantitative findings, responses to the open-ended question were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Students' responses were first reviewed and coded, and recurring patterns were grouped into broader themes.

The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to students' difficulties in English writing. The most prominent challenges were vocabulary limitations and grammatical difficulties, which were mentioned by the majority of participants. Many students reported lacking sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas clearly and frequently repeating words. Grammatical issues, particularly errors in tense usage and sentence construction, were also commonly reported.

In addition, a considerable number of students indicated difficulties in idea generation and text organization. These students reported that they often struggled to develop ideas or structure their writing effectively. Other themes included difficulty in expressing ideas clearly, reliance on

translating from the first language, and mechanical issues such as spelling and incorrect use of articles. Although these were mentioned less frequently, they still reflect important aspects of students' writing challenges. These themes are illustrated in students' responses. For example, one student stated, "I often struggle with words and repeat words when writing," while another commented, "I don't have enough vocabulary and make many grammar mistakes, so my writing is not clear." Similarly, difficulties in idea development were reflected in responses such as "I lack ideas when writing" and "I don't know how to organize my ideas."

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that students face both linguistic challenges (e.g., vocabulary and grammar) and cognitive challenges (e.g., idea generation and organization) in the writing process.

V. Discussion

The present study investigated non-English major students' use of self-regulated writing strategies and their relationship with writing ability. Overall, the findings reveal a complex but meaningful pattern.

5.1. Interpretation of Strategy Use

First, the descriptive results showed that students reported a high level of use across all three types of self-regulated writing strategies, with planning ($M = 3.77$) and evaluating ($M = 3.74$) slightly higher than monitoring ($M = 3.67$). However, despite this relatively high reported strategy use, students' self-perceived writing ability was only at a moderate level ($M = 2.62$). This contrast suggests a potential gap between students' awareness or reported use of strategies and their actual writing competence.

One possible explanation is that students may be familiar with these strategies at a surface level but do not apply them effectively. For example, although students report engaging in planning and revision, these processes may be limited in depth or consistency. In addition, learners in EFL contexts often prioritize grammatical accuracy, which may lead them to focus on lower-level concerns rather than higher-level processes such as idea development and organization. As a result, strategy use does not necessarily translate into improved writing performance.

5.2. Interpretation of Correlation Findings

The correlation results further support this interpretation. All three types of strategies were positively correlated with writing ability, with evaluating strategies showing the strongest relationship ($r = 0.385$), followed by monitoring ($r = 0.306$) and planning ($r = 0.283$). These findings indicate that students who report using self-regulated strategies more frequently tend to

have higher perceived writing ability. However, the strength of these relationships is relatively weak to moderate, suggesting that strategy use alone is not sufficient to explain variations in writing ability.

The stronger role of evaluating strategies is particularly noteworthy. This finding suggests that post-writing processes, such as reviewing and revising, may play a more critical role in writing development than pre-writing planning. Students who actively reflect on and improve their drafts may gain greater control over their writing quality. This aligns with previous research indicating that revision is a key component of effective writing.

At the same time, the relatively weaker correlations for planning and monitoring strategies may indicate that these strategies are either underutilized in meaningful ways or not effectively integrated into students' writing processes. This imbalance reflects a pattern observed in earlier studies, where learners tend to demonstrate partial self-regulation, focusing more on certain aspects of the writing process while neglecting others.

Taken together, these findings suggest that non-English major students are not lacking in awareness of self-regulated strategies, but rather in their effective and strategic application. Therefore, the issue is not simply whether students use strategies, but how well they use them.

5.3. The qualitative findings:

The qualitative findings further explain the gap observed in the quantitative results. Although students reported a high level of self-regulated strategy use, they continued to experience significant difficulties in vocabulary and grammar. This suggests that students may not be using self-regulated strategies effectively to address their linguistic limitations. In particular, the reported difficulties in idea generation and organization indicate that higher-level writing processes remain underdeveloped. These challenges may explain why students' writing ability remained at a moderate level despite their reported use of planning and evaluating strategies.

5.4. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study both support and extend previous research on self-regulated learning in EFL writing. Consistent with earlier studies such as Teng & Zhang, (2016), the present study found that self-regulated writing strategies were positively associated with writing ability. Similarly, the results align with (Sun & Wang, 2020), who reported that learners who engage more frequently in self-regulated strategies tend to demonstrate better writing performance.

However, the current findings also reveal an important difference. While previous studies often emphasize the effectiveness of self-regulated strategies in improving writing outcomes, the present

study found that students reported a high level of strategy use but only a moderate level of writing ability. This suggests that the relationship between strategy use and writing performance may not be as strong as previously assumed, particularly among non-English major students.

In addition, the relatively weak to moderate correlations observed in this study contrast with some prior research that reported stronger relationships between strategy use and writing performance. One possible explanation is that many participants in the present study may use self-regulated strategies at a surface level, without applying them effectively. This interpretation is supported by the qualitative findings, which indicate that students continue to struggle with vocabulary, grammar, and idea development despite reporting frequent strategy use.

Another noteworthy finding is that evaluating strategies showed the strongest relationship with writing ability. This partially supports previous research highlighting the importance of revision in the writing process. However, the relatively weaker role of planning strategies in the present study suggests that students may not be engaging deeply in pre-writing activities, which differs from studies that emphasize planning as a critical component of effective writing.

The present study extends previous research by highlighting a gap between perceived strategy use and actual writing ability among non-English major EFL students. This suggests that future research should not only examine the frequency of strategy use but also the quality and effectiveness of strategy application.

VI. Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for teaching writing in EFL contexts, particularly for non-English major students.

First, although students reported a high level of self-regulated strategy use, their writing ability remained at a moderate level. This suggests that instruction should not only focus on introducing strategies, but also on how to use them effectively. Teachers should provide explicit guidance on how to apply planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies in a structured and meaningful way during the writing process.

Second, given that evaluating strategies showed the strongest relationship with writing ability, greater emphasis should be placed on revision and reflection activities. Teachers can incorporate practices such as guided peer review, self-assessment checklists, and multiple drafting to help students develop stronger revising skills. These activities can encourage students to move beyond surface-level corrections and engage in deeper improvements of content and organization.

Third, the findings indicate a possible imbalance in students' strategy use. Therefore, instruction should aim to develop a more balanced use of strategies across all stages of writing. For example, teachers can model how to generate ideas and organize outlines during the planning stage, monitor coherence writing, and critically evaluate drafts after completion.

Finally, since strategy use alone does not fully explain writing ability, teachers should also consider other supporting factors such as vocabulary development, grammar instruction, and opportunities for regular writing practice. Integrating these elements with strategy instruction may lead to more effective improvement in students' writing performance.

VII. Limitations:

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study relied primarily on self-reported data, which may not fully reflect students' actual use of self-regulated writing strategies. Participants may have overestimated their strategy use due to social desirability or limited awareness of their own learning processes. Second, the measurement of writing ability was based on students' self-perceptions rather than objective assessment. As a result, the findings may not accurately represent students' actual writing performance. Future studies could incorporate writing tasks or scored essays to provide a more objective measure. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between self-regulated strategies and writing ability. Although positive correlations were found, it cannot be concluded that strategy use directly leads to improved writing performance. Fourth, the sample was limited to non-English major students from a single institutional context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other populations or educational settings. Finally, although the study included an open-ended question, the qualitative data were relatively limited in depth. A more comprehensive qualitative approach, such as interviews or think-aloud protocols, could provide deeper insights into how students actually apply self-regulated strategies writing. These limitations provide directions for future research to further explore self-regulated writing strategies using more robust and diverse research designs.

VIII. Conclusion:

This study examined the use of self-regulated writing strategies among non-English major EFL students and their relationship with writing ability. The findings showed that while students reported a high level of use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies, their writing ability remained at a moderate level, indicating a gap between perceived strategy use and actual competence. Correlation analysis revealed that all three types of strategies were positively associated with

writing ability, although the relationships were relatively weak to moderate, with evaluating strategies showing the strongest link. Qualitative findings further indicated that students continue to face difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and idea development, suggesting that self-regulated strategies may not be applied effectively. The study highlights that frequent strategy use alone does not guarantee improved writing performance and emphasizes the need for instructional approaches that support the effective and meaningful application of self-regulated writing strategies.

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