

Research Article

# English-Majors' Self-Study Practices in Reading Skills at Quy Nhon University

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## Abstract

This study examines English-majored students' self-study practices in reading skills at Quy Nhon University in response to the growing demand in learner autonomy in the expanded education system, especially in higher education. A mixed-methods approach was used, collecting quantitative and qualitative data from 160 English pedagogy students (K45 and K48) through a Likert-scale questionnaire analyzed with Cronbach's Alpha, descriptive statistics along with semi-structured interviews. The results show differences in self-study levels, patterns, and challenges, as well as the influence of motivation on autonomous learning. K45 senior students demonstrate more structured and effective self-study strategies, leading to higher reading performance, while K48 junior students participate more actively in self-learning activities but achieve lower scores. This suggests that junior students may lack strategic direction and academic maturity. The study recommends the introduction of reading strategies at the beginning of the curriculum for the future junior students as well as early training for K48 students, along with mentoring programs that connect junior students with seniors to promote effective learning practices.

## Keywords

self-study, reading skill, English-majored students

## 1. Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, learner autonomy is widely recognized as a key factor in academic achievement and sustainable learning. It refers to learners' ability to take responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning (Holec, 1981). Research shows

that autonomous learners tend to display stronger motivation and self-regulation, which are particularly important in higher education where students are expected to manage their learning independently (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991). Among the four language skills, reading holds a central role because it

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provides access to academic knowledge and disciplinary discourse (Grabe, 2009). Beyond academic purposes, reading also broadens learners' linguistic competence and sociocultural understanding. For English-majored students, especially those pursuing teacher education programs, reading competence extends beyond fulfilling curricular expectations; it ensures a professional skill that supports their future roles in classroom instruction, material development, and advanced academic engagement.

Extensive research on reading development has been conducted globally, with significant contributions from both Western and Asian backgrounds. From an international theoretical point of view, early cognitive and interactive models of reading (Rumelhart, 1977; Grabe, 2009) have explained comprehension as the interaction between bottom-up linguistic decoding and top-down schema activation, which forms the theoretical basis for strategy-based reading instruction. In addition, metacognitive awareness has been consistently identified as a critical predictor of successful comprehension. Kouider and Carla (2002), through the development of the MARS framework, demonstrate that readers who consistently monitor and regulate their strategic behaviors tend to achieve superior comprehension outcomes.

In many Asian education systems, research shows that exam-oriented traditions strongly influence reading instruction and students' learning habits, often leading to translation-based and teacher-centered practices (Anderson, 2003; Zhang, L. J., & Wu, 2009). To address these issues, recent reforms have focused on promoting learner autonomy and self-regulated learning, based on the work of Zimmerman (2000) and Richard and Edward (2000), who highlight the importance of motivation and self-determination in academic achievement. In addition, studies grounded in expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) demonstrate that intrinsic motivation significantly increases students' engagement, persistence, and deeper processing in reading activities.

As a public university in central Vietnam, Quy Nhon University provides English pedagogy students with systematic training in language skills, linguistics, and teaching methodology. Students are expected to achieve a high level of reading competence to meet academic and professional standards. The university also offers unlimited access to digital tools and online platforms, which support autonomous reading. However, preliminary observations indicate clear differences in self-study practices between cohorts, especially junior and senior students. These differences may result from variations in academic maturity, learning experience, and exposure to strategic instruction, leading to distinct patterns of engagement and reading performance.

The overall aim of this study is to understand the current

state of self-studying reading skills among English-majored students at Quy Nhon University, especially the difficulties which each group faces and the learning strategies they are applying. To achieve its aim, it seeks to answer two research questions:

1. *What is the current situation of self-studying reading skills among English-majored students at Quy Nhon University?*

*What difficulties do English-majored students face when self-studying reading skills and the measures they take to solve their difficulties?*

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Self-study

Self-study is widely recognized as a key principle in modern language education, especially at the university level where students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. It is closely associated with the concept of learner autonomy, defined as the ability to take charge of one's learning through setting objectives, selecting appropriate strategies, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes (Holec, 1981). Zimmerman (2000) describes self-regulated learning as a cyclical process of planning, performing, and reflecting, highlighting the importance of strategic awareness and self-monitoring for academic success.

Research strongly supports the link between autonomy and positive learning outcomes. Ilkay and Melek (2018) show that students with strong self-directed learning skills demonstrate greater persistence, higher motivation, and better academic performance. Similarly, Ayfer (2003) finds that students who are ready for autonomous learning are more capable of managing foreign language acquisition effectively. These findings suggest that autonomy can be developed through proper guidance and supportive learning environments rather than being a fixed personal trait.

In EFL contexts, learner autonomy is particularly important because students often have limited exposure to English outside the compulsory educational system. Dagnaw (2021) argues that autonomous learners can overcome limited instructional time by using various independent learning resources. Duong M. T. (2021) also reports that Vietnamese EFL students who perceive themselves as autonomous tend to show greater initiative and strategic engagement. However, although many students value independent learning, their actual practices do not always reflect this belief, indicating a gap between awareness and action.

Studies in Vietnam further reveal that autonomy is often limited by traditional teacher-centered approaches. Nguyen T. N. and Bui (2023) note that English-majored students frequently lack systematic planning and effective

self-evaluation skills. Doan and his companions (2023) similarly emphasize the need to improve students' goal-setting abilities and intrinsic motivation. Duong T. P. C. and Phuong (2024) argue that fostering autonomy in Vietnamese universities requires attention to contextual factors such as curriculum design, institutional support, and cultural influences.

Motivation is another crucial component of learner autonomy. According to self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation plays a central role in sustaining independent learning behaviors (Richard & Edward, 2000). Jorge and his companions (2017) confirm that students with stronger internal motivation are more likely to engage in autonomous learning. In Vietnam, Phan and Huynh (2025) show that perceptions of autonomy among English majors differ depending on demographic and academic factors, suggesting that autonomy may develop differently across student groups.

## 2.2. Reading skill

Reading is widely recognized as a complex cognitive and social process, not simply the mechanical decoding of words. Basic theories explain reading as the interaction between bottom-up processing (such as word recognition and sentence analysis) and top-down processing (such as using background knowledge and activating prior experience). Rumelhart (1977) and Grabe (2009) argue that effective comprehension results from the combination of these two processes, forming the foundation of interactive reading models in EFL teaching. From this perspective, reading ability involves not only language knowledge but also the strategic construction of meaning.

Metacognitive control is also an important factor in reading development. Kouider and Carla (2002), through the MARS framework, identify three main types of reading strategies: global, problem-solving, and support strategies. Their study shows that readers who actively monitor and adjust their understanding achieve better results. This focus on strategic awareness is closely related to learner autonomy and self-regulated learning, where learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process (Zimmerman, 2000; İlkey & Melek, 2018).

In university EFL contexts, reading is strongly connected to academic literacy. English-majored students are required to understand complex texts, analyze arguments, and evaluate information critically. Hyland (2004) emphasizes that academic reading requires analytical and evaluative skills in addition to basic comprehension. However, studies in Vietnam show that many students still rely heavily on translation and teacher-centered instruction, which may limit deeper understanding of texts (Duong M. T. and his companions, 2020; Truong, 2021).

Research in Vietnamese universities also highlights

ongoing difficulties in reading self-study. Nguyen N. B. and his companions. (2021) report that students face problems related to limited vocabulary, weak analytical skills, and poor self-monitoring. Similarly, Nguyen T. N. and Bui (2023) find that although students recognize the importance of independent study, their reading habits are often exam-focused and lack clear structure. These findings reflect broader concerns about learner autonomy in Vietnam, where dependence on teachers remains common (Duong T. P. C & Phuong, 2024).

Motivation is another key factor influencing reading engagement. According to self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation is essential for maintaining effective learning behaviors (Richard & Edward, 2000). Jorge and his companions (2017) show that students with higher intrinsic motivation are more likely to use deeper reading strategies and persist with difficult tasks. In the Vietnamese higher education context, Phan and Huynh (2025) further confirm that perceived autonomy and motivation significantly affect English majors' learning behaviors, including their reading practices.

## 2.3. Difficulties in Reading

Reading is considered one of the most important skills in English language learning. However, many students face difficulties when developing reading ability, especially in English as a foreign language context. In the field of second language acquisition, reading is seen as a complex process that requires learners to recognize words, understand grammar, and interpret the meaning of a text. Grabe and Fredricka (2002) pointed out that successful reading involves several processes working together, such as word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, sentence understanding, and overall text comprehension. When learners do not have enough language knowledge, it becomes more difficult for them to understand what they read.

One common difficulty in reading is limited vocabulary knowledge. When students meet many unfamiliar words in a text, they may find it hard to understand the main ideas and important information. Norbert (2000) stated that vocabulary knowledge plays a key role in reading comprehension because learners need to understand many words in order to understand a text. Similarly, Michael (1990) explained that limited vocabulary can interrupt the reading process and make comprehension more difficult. When learners stop frequently to check word meanings, their reading becomes slower and they may lose the general meaning of the passage.

Another difficulty is related to complex grammatical structures. Academic texts often contain long sentences and complicated grammar, which can be challenging for language learners. Jeremy (2007) pointed out that learners who are not familiar with certain grammatical structures may have trouble

understanding how ideas are connected in a sentence. As a result, they may misunderstand parts of the text or fail to understand the overall message.

Background knowledge is also an important factor in reading comprehension. According to Rumelhart (1980), reading comprehension depends partly on the reader's prior knowledge, which is explained in schema theory. When learners already know something about the topic of a text, they can understand the content more easily. However, when the topic is unfamiliar or includes cultural references that learners do not know, comprehension becomes more difficult. Similarly, Patricia and Joan (1983) suggested that limited background knowledge can reduce learners' ability to understand a text fully.

Reading difficulties may also be related to how learners manage their understanding while reading. From the perspective of self-regulated learning, Zimmerman (2002) explained that effective learners usually monitor their comprehension and try to notice when they do not understand something. However, some learners may not realize when they misunderstand a text or may find it difficult to stay focused while reading. This can lead to frustration and lower confidence when dealing with difficult reading materials.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopts mixed-methods research design in order to provide both breadth and depth in examining English-majored students' self-study practices in reading skills at Quy Nhon University. The study involved two groups of participants labelled the K45 students (the senior students) and the K48 students (the junior students) who both studied the major English Teaching Education. Each group consists of 80 students at Quy Nhon University. Both quantitative approach and qualitative approach were employed to answer the research questions. Particularly, the quantitative approach consists of a preliminary questionnaire of 50 participants which was conducted to filter out content relevant to the study, followed by a formal questionnaire to collect data for analysis. The qualitative approach consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with a select group of students from the survey, aiming to gain deeper insight into their experiences, motivations, challenges, and self-learning strategies.

The study consisted of two phases. Phase 1, starting with the questionnaire, includes two steps. Step 1 deals with the preliminary questionnaire, lasted 1 week, and step 2 was about the final questionnaire, lasted two weeks. Phase 2 then followed with interviews and lasted about one week. In step 1, the questionnaire was conducted with randomly chosen participants. The questionnaire was constructed based on a

5-point Likert scale: from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. In step 2, feedback gathered from the preliminary questionnaire was then used to revise and finalize the official questionnaire on the 160 participants, lasted about 2 weeks. Next, in phase 2, ten random students, five from each group were then chosen to conduct the interviews independently. The interview questions included questions about self-learning motivation, methods for learning reading skills, and the difficulties students encountered when self-learning reading skills.

#### 3.2. Data collection

The data for analysis in this study was gained through the employment of three research instruments, including two questionnaires, one preliminary and one final, and interview.

The preliminary questionnaire was conducted to create a survey form with basic information and main contents that closely resembled the official survey. The survey was conducted experimentally with a sample of 25 students from K48 group and 25 students from K45 group of the English Teaching Education major at Quy Nhon University. The research sample was selected using a random sampling method. The preliminary questionnaire was constructed based on a 5-point Likert scale: from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Quantitative data was collected using a survey questionnaire via Google Forms. The reliability of the experimental survey results was checked using Cronbach's Alpha, removing variables with a variable-total correlation coefficient  $< 0.3$ . Simultaneously, feedback from participants regarding the clarity and appropriateness of the questions was incorporated. Based on this, the questionnaire was refined and perfected for the official survey on a total of 160 students, with 80 students from each group.

The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire developed based on established theoretical models of learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, and reading strategy use that were gathered from the preliminary survey. The questionnaire was conducted with a total of 160 students (80 students from the group K45 and 80 students from the group K48) of the English Teaching Education major at Quy Nhon University. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections: the demographic information of the participants, the frequency of self-studying the reading skill, the difficulties that the participants might face and the reading strategies and patterns they use when self-studying the reading skill. This questionnaire also used the same construction as the preliminary one.

To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students from both cohorts. A total of 10 participants, 5 from each group were chosen based on variation in their survey responses to capture diverse perspectives (e.g., high-performing vs. low-performing

students). The interview participants were expected to comment about the experiences they face when they practice reading on their own, the reading strategies they usually use and the difficulties they have encountered the most.

### 3.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical procedures to ensure reliability and accuracy. Cronbach's Alpha was first applied to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire scales, and all constructs met the acceptable reliability threshold ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$ ). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were then used to describe students' overall levels of self-study, strategy use, motivation, and self-regulation. Comparative analyses were conducted to identify differences between K45 (senior students) and K48 (junior students), particularly in terms of reading behaviors and academic maturity.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to strategy use, challenges, and motivational factors. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of students' reading self-study practices.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Current situation of self-studying reading skills among English-majored students

#### 4.1.1. Students' latest test reading performance

Table 1 shows that both groups achieved relatively high mean scores; however, there are also slight differences in the component of the table.

**Table 1.** Comparison in the latest test reading performance between the two groups

Group	Highest score	Lowest score	Average score	Number
K45	9.6	5	8.3	80
K48	9.5	6	8.2	80

This table presents a comparison of reading performance in their latest reading test between students in the K48 and K45 groups, focusing on their highest scores, lowest scores, mean scores, and sample sizes. Overall, both groups obtained relatively high average results, with K45 achieving a slightly higher mean score (8.3) than K48 (8.2). Regarding maximum achievement, K45 recorded a higher top score (9.6) compared

to K48 (9.5). However, K45 showed a considerably lower minimum score (5), whereas K48's lowest score was 7, suggesting greater score dispersion within the K45 group.

#### 4.1.2. Students' learning patterns

When it comes to learning patterns, the two groups exhibit fundamental similarities but also distinct differences.

**Table 2.** Comparison in time spending on self-study reading after classes between two groups

Group	15 minutes a day	30 minutes a day	60 minutes a day	Over 60 minutes a day	Number
K48	28.75%	42.5%	20%	8.75%	80
K45	27.5%	42.5%	20%	10%	80

Table 2 indicates noticeable differences in the time devoted to reading self-study between the two groups. In general, both groups show a similar distribution of study time. The largest proportion of students in both cohorts spend 30 minutes per day on reading practice (42.5%). Meanwhile, 20% of students in each group study for 60 minutes per day, indicating a moderate level of commitment to reading practice. A smaller proportion of students dedicate over 60 minutes, with K45 (10%) slightly higher than K48 (8.75%). The percentage of students who spend only 15 minutes per day is also relatively similar between the two groups (28.75% for K48 and 27.5% for K45). These findings suggest that the two cohorts demonstrate comparable patterns in time allocation for reading self-study, with most students engaging in short but regular practice sessions.

**Table 3.** Comparison in preference to self-study after classes

Group	By yourself	In groups	Number
K48	83.75%	16.25%	80
K45	88.75%	11.25%	80

In terms of study mode, both groups clearly favored individual learning over group work. A substantial majority of students in K48 (83.7%) and K45 (88.75%) reported studying on their own, whereas only 16.25% and 11.25%, respectively, preferred collaborative study. The similarity in percentages indicates a consistent pattern across the two groups, with minimal differences. Overall, independent study emerges as the predominant learning approach in both groups.

Table 4. Comparison in frequency of self-studying reading skill between two groups

Group	2 times	3 times	4 times	Over 5 times	Number
K48	53.75%	33.5%	8.75%	5%	80
K45	61.25%	30%	5%	3.75%	80

With respect to weekly practice frequency, most students in both groups reported engaging in reading self-study twice per week, accounting for 53.75% in K48 and 61.25% in K45. The percentages for three times per week were nearly identical (31.1% in K48 and 31.4% in K45), reflecting comparable levels of moderate engagement. The proportion of students who practice three times per week is relatively similar between the two groups, with 33.5% in K48 and 30% in K45, suggesting a comparable level of moderate engagement in reading self-study. However, differences can be observed in higher-frequency practice. A slightly larger percentage of K48 students (8.75%) reported practicing four times per week, compared with 5% of K45 students. Meanwhile, the proportion of students practicing more than five times per week is relatively small in both groups, accounting for 5% in K48 and 3.75% in K45.

Overall, the findings indicate that students in both cohorts maintain regular reading self-study habits, with the majority studying two to three times per week. Although the differences between the groups are not substantial, K48 students appear slightly more represented in the higher-frequency categories, while K45 students show a higher concentration in the twice-per-week category.

**Table 5.** Differences in location to self-study reading after classes

Group	Home	Café	Home, University Library, Café	University Library	Number
K48	86.25%	5%	7.5%	1.25%	80
K45	91.25%	6.25%	1.25%	1.25%	80

Table 5 shows that home was the predominant study location for students in both cohorts, with 86.25% of K48 students and 91.25% of K45 students choosing to study at home. Other locations are used far less frequently. Only a small percentage of students learn in cafés (5% of K48 and 6.25% of K45). A slightly higher proportion of K48 students (7.5%) reported studying across multiple locations such as home, the university library, and cafés, while this pattern is less common among K45 students (1.25%). The university library alone is selected by only 1.25% of students in both

groups, indicating that it is not a primary study environment. Overall, the findings suggest that most students prefer the comfort and convenience of home for their independent reading practice.

#### 4.1.3. Students' learning methods

The descriptive statistics was run to check the mean score of student's learning methods in self-study in reading, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Overall score of perceived learning methods in self-studying reading

Items	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
[1. I prepare a new lesson before Reading class.]	K48	80	3.79	0.852	0.095
	K45	80	3.95	0.899	0.100
[2. I learn advanced and reference documents.]	K48	80	3.51	0.763	0.085
	K45	80	3.53	0.914	0.102
[3. I self-check and evaluate what I studied in the previous Reading lesson]	K48	80	3.73	0.746	0.083
	K45	80	3.74	0.910	0.102
[4. I only do the assigned Reading tasks.]	K48	80	3.54	0.967	0.108
	K45	80	3.53	0.954	0.107
[5. I use different websites to help me]	K48	80	4.11	0.779	0.087
	K45	80	4.00	0.941	0.105
[6. I read stories, novels, and newspapers in English.]	K48	80	3.60	1.038	0.116
	K45	80	3.81	1.020	0.114
[7. I use Social networks (Youtube, Facebook,...) to self-study Reading skill]	K48	80	3.94	0.998	0.112
	K45	80	4.11	0.900	0.101
[8. I use English Learning Mobile Apps.]	K48	80	3.69	1.063	0.119
	K45	80	3.33	1.188	0.133

The descriptive statistics show that English-majored students in both groups frequently applied various methods to support their autonomous reading practices.

Regarding lesson preparation, item 1 ("I prepare a new lesson before Reading class") showed a relatively high level

of agreement in both groups. The mean score for the K48 group was  $M = 3.79$  ( $SD = .85$ ), while the K45 group reported a slightly higher mean of  $M = 3.95$  ( $SD = .90$ ). The detail of item 1 can be shown in Table 7.

*Table 7. Details of items 1*

<b>[1. I prepare a new lesson before Reading class.]</b>						
Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Rarely	4	5.0	5.0	5.0
		Sometimes	27	33.8	33.8	38.8
		Often	31	38.8	38.8	77.5
		Very often	18	22.5	22.5	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
K45	Valid	Never	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
		Rarely	3	3.8	3.8	5.0
		Sometimes	19	23.8	23.8	28.7
		Often	33	41.3	41.3	70.0
		Very often	24	30.0	30.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In detail, in the K48 group, 31 students selected “Often” and 18 selected “Very often”, accounting for 49 students (61.3%) in total. Meanwhile, in the K45 group, 33 students reported “Often” and 24 selected “Very often”, representing 57 students (71.3%). This suggests that a considerable number of students actively prepared lessons before attending reading classes.

Similarly, for self-evaluation strategies, item 3 (“I self-check and evaluate what I studied in the previous reading lesson”) also received relatively high responses in both groups. The mean scores were  $M = 3.73$  ( $SD = .75$ ) for K48 and  $M = 3.74$  ( $SD = .91$ ) for K45.

*Table 8. Details of item 3*

<b>[3. I self-check and evaluate what I studied in the previous Reading lesson]</b>						
Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Rarely	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Sometimes	14	17.5	17.5	20.0
		Often	37	46.3	46.3	66.3
		Very	27	33.8	33.8	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Rarely	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Sometimes	30	37.5	37.5	40.0
		Often	36	45.0	45.0	85.0
		Very often	12	15.0	15.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
K45	Valid	Never	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Rarely	2	2.5	2.5	5.0
		Sometimes	28	35.0	35.0	40.0
		Often	31	38.8	38.8	78.8
		Very often	17	21.3	21.3	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In Table 8, 36 students in K48 selected “Often” and 12 selected “Very often”, accounting for 48 students (60%). In the K45 group, 31 students reported “Often” and 17 selected “Very often”, representing 48 students (60.1%). These results indicate that many students regularly evaluated their previous learning progress.

In terms of learning resources, item 5 (“I use different websites to help me”) recorded the highest mean score among the methods. The K48 group reported  $M = 4.11$  ( $SD = .78$ ), while the K45 group had  $M = 4.00$  ( $SD = .94$ ). We can further understand the details of item 5 through table 10.

*Table 9. Details of item 5*

<b>[5. I use different websites to help me]</b>						
Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Rarely	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Sometimes	14	17.5	17.5	20.0
		Often	37	46.3	46.3	66.3
		Very	27	33.8	33.8	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

		often				
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
K45	Valid	Never	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
		Rarely	6	7.5	7.5	8.8
		Sometimes	11	13.8	13.8	22.5
		Often	36	45.0	45.0	67.5
		Very often	26	32.5	32.5	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 stated that 37 students in the K48 group selected “Often” and 27 selected “Very often”, accounting for 64 students (80.1%). Similarly, in the K45 group, 36 students reported “Often” and 26 selected “Very often”, representing 62 students (77.5%). This finding highlights the important role of online resources in supporting students’ autonomous reading activities.

A similar pattern was found for social network usage, as shown in item 7 (“I use social networks such as YouTube and Facebook to self-study reading skills”). The mean score for the K48 group was  $M = 3.94$  ( $SD = .99$ ), while the K45 group reported a slightly higher mean of  $M = 4.11$  ( $SD = .90$ ). The details of item 7 can be shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Details of item 7

[7. I use Social networks (Youtube, Facebook,...) to self-study Reading skill]						
Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Never	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Rarely	5	6.3	6.3	8.8
		Sometimes	15	18.8	18.8	27.5
		Often	32	40.0	40.0	67.5
		Very often	26	32.5	32.5	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
		K45	Valid	Never	1	1.3
Rarely	3			3.8	3.8	5.0

	Sometimes	13	16.3	16.3	21.3
	Often	32	40.0	40.0	61.3
	Very often	31	38.8	38.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In Table 10, 32 students in K48 selected “Often” and 26 selected “Very often”, accounting for 58 students (72.5%). In the K45 group, 32 students reported “Often” and 31 selected “Very often”, representing 63 students (78.8%). These results indicate that social networking platforms are widely used as tools for independent reading practice.

For extensive reading, item 6 (“I read stories, novels, and newspapers in English”) also received relatively positive responses. The mean score was  $M = 3.60$  ( $SD = 1.04$ ) for K48 and  $M = 3.81$  ( $SD = 1.02$ ) for K45.

Table 11. Details of item 6

[6. I read stories, novels, and newspapers in English.]						
Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
K48	Valid	Never	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
		Rarely	11	13.8	13.8	15.0
		Sometimes	26	32.5	32.5	47.5
		Often	23	28.7	28.7	76.3
		Very often	19	23.8	23.8	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
		K45	Valid	Never	1	1.3
Rarely	7			8.8	8.8	10.0
Sometimes	23			28.7	28.7	38.8
Often	24			30.0	30.0	68.8
Very often	25			31.3	31.3	100.0
Total	80			100.0	100.0	

It can be seen in Table 11 that in the K48 group, 23 students selected “Often” and 19 selected “Very often”, accounting for

42 students (52.5%). Meanwhile, in the K45 group, 24 students reported “Often” and 25 selected “Very often”, representing 49 students (61.3%). This suggests that many students attempt to broaden their reading exposure beyond course materials. Meanwhile, the use of mobile learning applications, as shown in item 8, revealed some differences between the two groups. The mean score for K48 was  $M = 3.69$  ( $SD = 1.06$ ), while the K45 group reported a lower mean of  $M = 3.33$  ( $SD = 1.19$ ). To further understand this item, table 8 was created.

**Table 12.** Details of item 8

<b>[8. I use English Learning Mobile Apps.]</b>						
Group			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
K48	Valid	Never	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Rarely	10	12.5	12.5	15.0
		Sometimes	19	23.8	23.8	38.8
		Often	29	36.3	36.3	75.0
		Very often	20	25.0	25.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
K45	Valid	Never	5	6.3	6.3	6.3
		Rarely	16	20.0	20.0	26.3
		Sometimes	23	28.7	28.7	55.0
		Often	20	25.0	25.0	80.0
		Very often	16	20.0	20.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In detail, 29 students in K48 selected “Often” and 20 selected “Very often”, accounting for 49 students (61.3%). In contrast, in the K45 group, 20 students reported “Often” and 16 selected “Very often”, representing 36 students (45%). This indicates that mobile learning applications were used more frequently among the K48 students.

In contrast, item 4 (“I only do the assigned reading tasks”) received relatively moderate scores in both groups ( $M = 3.54$  for K48 and  $M = 3.53$  for K45). This is further shown in Table 13.

**Table 13.** Details of item 4

<b>[4. I only do the assigned Reading tasks.]</b>						
Group			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
K48	Valid	Never	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
		Rarely	5	6.3	6.3	8.8
		Sometimes	37	46.3	46.3	55.0
		Often	20	25.0	25.0	80.0
		Very often	16	20.0	20.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	
K45	Valid	Never	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
		Rarely	10	12.5	12.5	13.8
		Sometimes	28	35.0	35.0	48.8
		Often	28	35.0	35.0	83.8
		Very often	13	16.3	16.3	100.0
		Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In the K48 group, 20 students selected “Often” and 16 selected “Very often”, accounting for 36 students (45%). Similarly, in the K45 group, 28 students reported “Often” and 13 selected “Very often”, representing 41 students (51.3%). However, a considerable number of students also selected “Sometimes”, suggesting that many learners occasionally read beyond the assigned tasks.

Overall, the results show that English-majored students in both groups used various methods to support their self-study in reading. Most items had relatively high mean scores, indicating that students often prepared lessons, monitored their learning progress, and used different learning resources. These practices reflect key aspects of self-regulated learning, such as planning and monitoring one’s learning process (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2021). Digital resources also played an important role in students’ reading activities. Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook were frequently used, suggesting that technology can effectively support independent learning (Reinders & Benson, 2022). Although the learning patterns of the two groups were generally similar, some differences were observed. K45 students reported slightly higher levels of lesson preparation and extensive reading, while K48 students used mobile learning applications

more frequently, reflecting the growing role of mobile technology in language learning (Kukulka-Hulme, 2020).

## 4.2. Difficulties facing English-majors on self-studying reading skill and the measures they take to solve the difficulties

### 4.2.1. Difficulties facing English-majors on self-studying reading skill

The descriptive statistics was run to check the mean score of student's difficulties in self-study in reading, as shown in Table 14.

**Table 14.** Overall score of perceived difficulties in self-studying reading

Items	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Q1. I have a limited English vocabulary when studying in Reading independently.	K48	80	3.56	0.884	0.099
	K45	80	3.09	0.996	0.111
Q2. I have difficulty guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words from context.	K48	80	3.54	0.913	0.102
	K45	80	3.10	0.949	0.106
Q3. I have difficulty understanding texts that contain specialized or technical vocabulary.	K48	80	3.71	0.799	0.089
	K45	80	3.33	1.003	0.112
Q4. I am not able to use my existing knowledge effectively to analyze a Reading passage.	K48	80	3.15	1.092	0.122
	K45	80	2.86	1.088	0.122
Q5. I find many English Reading topics unfamiliar or difficult to relate to.	K48	80	3.51	0.968	0.108
	K45	80	3.25	0.788	0.088
Q6. I do not know	K48	80	2.91	1.127	0.126

what to do or how to start when reading an English text.	K45	80	2.59	1.122	0.125
Q7. I have difficulty identifying the main idea of a reading passage.	K48	80	3.05	1.066	0.119
	K45	80	2.86	1.088	0.122
Q8. I need to read a passage many times in order to understand it.	K48	80	3.40	1.051	0.117
	K45	80	3.21	0.910	0.102
Q9. I lack motivation when studying English Reading skills by myself.	K48	80	3.34	0.993	0.111
	K45	80	3.10	1.098	0.123
Q10. I have difficulty making inferences while reading English texts.	K48	80	3.29	0.944	0.106
	K45	80	3.06	1.060	0.118
Q11. I am not able to analyze the content of an English Reading passage effectively.	K48	80	3.15	1.008	0.113
	K45	80	2.94	1.095	0.122
Q12. I am not proficient in Reading skills such as skimming and scanning.	K48	80	3.14	1.003	0.112
	K45	80	2.70	1.084	0.121
Q12. I have little interest or passion in reading English texts.	K48	80	3.24	0.997	0.111
	K45	80	2.96	1.012	0.113
Q13. I do not have any specific strategies when reading English texts.	K48	80	3.08	1.016	0.114
	K45	80	2.85	1.137	0.127
Q14. I face other difficulties when self-studying in Reading.	K48	80	3.41	0.937	0.105
	K45	80	3.13	1.011	0.113

Table 14 presents the overall results regarding the difficulties experienced by English-majored students when self-studying Reading skills. The table compares two groups,

K48 and K45, with 80 participants in each group. Overall, the mean scores range from 2.59 to 3.71, indicating that students experience a moderate to relatively high level of difficulty in different aspects of independent reading.

One of the most significant findings is that vocabulary-related problems are the most common challenge for students. Item Q3, which refers to understanding texts containing specialized or technical vocabulary, received the highest mean scores in the table, with 3.71 for K48 and 3.33 for K45. Similarly, Item Q1, concerning limited English vocabulary when studying Reading independently, recorded relatively high scores (3.56 for K48 and 3.09 for K45). Item Q2, describing the difficulty of guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words from context, also showed notable scores of 3.54 for K48 and 3.10 for K45. These findings highlight the important role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. When learners lack sufficient vocabulary, especially academic or specialized terms, they may struggle to understand the overall meaning of a text.

Another difficulty shown in Table 14 relates to unfamiliar reading topics. Item Q5, which states that many English reading topics are unfamiliar or difficult to relate to, recorded mean scores of 3.51 for K48 and 3.25 for K45. This suggests that background knowledge influences reading comprehension. When students are not familiar with a topic, they may find it more difficult to connect new information with their existing knowledge, which can slow down the reading process and reduce comprehension.

The results also reveal difficulties related to reading strategies and higher-level comprehension skills. For example, Item Q10, referring to difficulty making inferences while reading English texts, obtained mean scores of 3.29 for K48 and 3.06 for K45. Similarly, Item Q7, concerning difficulty identifying the main idea of a passage, recorded scores of 3.05 for K48 and 2.86 for K45. These results suggest that some students have not fully developed advanced reading skills such as identifying key information or interpreting implied meanings. In addition, Item Q12, which indicates that students are not proficient in techniques such as skimming and scanning, showed scores of 3.14 for K48 and 2.70 for K45. Since these strategies are essential for efficient reading, limited proficiency may affect students' ability to process texts quickly and effectively.

Some difficulties are also related to learning strategies and self-regulation. Item Q13, referring to the lack of specific strategies when reading English texts, recorded mean scores of 3.08 for K48 and 2.85 for K45. Likewise, Item Q6, describing the difficulty of knowing how to begin reading an English text, showed scores of 2.91 for K48 and 2.59 for K45. These findings suggest that some students may not have developed effective approaches for independent reading, which may reduce their confidence when studying Reading on their own.

Motivation and interest also influence students' self-study performance. Item Q9, which concerns a lack of motivation when studying Reading independently, recorded mean scores of 3.34 for K48 and 3.10 for K45. Similarly, the item referring to limited interest in reading English texts showed scores of 3.24 for K48 and 2.96 for K45. Although these values are not the highest in the table, they still indicate that motivational factors may affect students' reading practice and progress.

Another noticeable pattern in Table 14 is that K48 students reported higher mean scores than K45 students across all items. This suggests that K48 students generally experience more difficulties when self-studying Reading. One possible explanation is that K45 students have more academic experience and have been exposed to a wider range of English reading materials during their studies. As a result, they may gradually develop stronger vocabulary knowledge and reading strategies, which helps them feel more confident in independent reading.

The findings in Table 14 are generally consistent with recent research on second language reading difficulties. Vocabulary-related problems received relatively high scores, indicating that many students struggle with limited vocabulary and difficulty guessing word meanings during independent reading. This supports more recent studies which emphasize that vocabulary knowledge remains a key factor influencing reading comprehension in second language learning (Nation, 2022; Zhang, D. & Zou, 2021).

In addition, the results show that some students lack effective reading strategies. Difficulties in identifying the main idea, making inferences, and using techniques such as skimming and scanning were reported by both groups. Recent research has also indicated that students who do not apply appropriate reading strategies often struggle to process and understand texts efficiently (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Teng, 2020).

Another point consistent with recent research is the influence of background knowledge and motivation. Some students reported that many reading topics are unfamiliar and that they sometimes lack motivation when studying Reading independently. These factors may reduce students' interest and make the learning process more challenging. This finding aligns with recent studies highlighting the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension as well as research emphasizing the role of learner motivation and self-regulated learning in language development (Nguyen, T. T. M. & Habók, 2021; Teng & Zhang, L. J., 2022).

Overall, the findings of this study are similar to those reported in recent research on EFL reading difficulties. Limited vocabulary, insufficient reading strategies, unfamiliar topics, and motivational factors remain common challenges for learners when developing their Reading skills through independent study.

#### 4.2.2. Measures English-majors adopt to solve their difficulties

In-depth interviews with 10 participants, 5 from the K45 group and 5 from the other group revealed that students from both K48 and K45 groups reported applying a variety of strategies to overcome difficulties when self-studying Reading skills. These measures mainly focus on improving reading comprehension, expanding vocabulary, and enhancing reading strategies.

First, many students reported using reading strategies such as skimming and scanning to improve reading efficiency. Several interviewees explained that they quickly read the text to understand the general idea before focusing on details. For example, one K48 student said they *“usually apply skimming and scanning to understand main ideas and find specific information,”* while another mentioned that they *“skim the text to get the main idea first and then scan for specific information.”* Similarly, K45 students reported using the same strategies. One participant stated that they *“use skim and scan quite popular,”* while another explained that they *“skim the text to guess the main ideas and then scan for keywords or topic sentences.”* These responses show that students apply common reading strategies to process texts more efficiently, which is consistent with studies emphasizing the role of strategic reading in comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Teng, 2020).

Another commonly mentioned strategy is guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words from context. One K48 student explained that they *“try to guess words’ meanings from context instead of using the dictionary immediately.”* Other students also reported that they *“guess meaning from context and practice with reading exercises regularly.”* In addition, several interviewees mentioned recording new vocabulary. For example, one participant said they *“write down new words to review later,”* while another stated that they *“take note of new vocabulary in a small notebook and then check the dictionary.”* These practices help students gradually expand their vocabulary, which plays an important role in reading comprehension (Nation, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2021).

Regular reading practice was also mentioned as an important strategy. One K48 student explained that they *“practice reading regularly and choose materials at my level.”* Similarly, some K45 students reported reading different types of texts. One participant stated that they *“read a variety of materials such as short stories or academic texts,”* while another mentioned engaging in extensive reading through *“news, online websites or educational blogs to pick up vocabulary.”* These activities allow students to become familiar with different topics and writing styles, which supports the development of reading skills (Macalister, 2021).

Some students also described using active reading techniques to understand texts more deeply. For instance, one

K45 student explained that they *“highlight and map out how the authors connect their ideas.”* Another participant reported that they *“analyze vocabulary, grammar and text organization”* during reading. Additionally, a student mentioned that they often *“summarize the passage to improve comprehension and retention.”* These techniques demonstrate that students actively engage with texts, which is an important aspect of effective learning and self-regulation (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2021).

Some students also reported translating short passages to better understand difficult texts. One K45 participant stated that they *“practice gradually translating from short paragraphs to passages to learn new vocabulary.”* Others mentioned rereading difficult texts several times. For example, one student explained that they sometimes *“have to read from twice to three times to get the general meaning.”* These strategies help students process complex sentences and improve comprehension.

Overall, the interview results show that English-majored students apply various strategies to support their self-study in reading, including skimming and scanning, guessing word meanings from context, vocabulary note-taking, extensive reading, and active reading techniques. These strategies help students deal with challenges such as limited vocabulary and complex texts while improving their reading comprehension and learning autonomy. The findings are consistent with recent research highlighting the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension (Nation, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2021), the role of reading strategies in effective text processing (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Teng, 2020), and the significance of self-regulated learning and learner autonomy in language development (Reinders & Benson, 2022; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2021).

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study show that English-majored students generally have positive perceptions of self-studying reading skills. Most participants recognized the importance of practicing reading outside the classroom and believed that independent learning helps improve their reading comprehension. This result highlights the role of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in language development. However, the results also indicate that students still face several difficulties when studying reading independently. The most common challenge is limited vocabulary, especially when students encounter unfamiliar or academic words in reading texts. Many students also reported difficulties understanding long or complex passages. These findings support previous research emphasizing the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. In addition, some students struggle with

reading strategies such as identifying the main idea, making inferences, and applying skimming and scanning techniques. Motivational factors, including limited interest in certain topics and difficulty maintaining concentration, also affect students' independent reading practice. The comparison between the two cohorts shows that K48 students reported slightly higher levels of difficulty than K45 students. This difference may be related to the greater academic experience of K45 students, who have had more opportunities to practice reading English texts. Nevertheless, both groups showed similar patterns in the types of difficulties they encountered.

The study also found that students use various strategies to overcome these challenges. Common strategies include skimming and scanning texts, guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words from context, and recording new vocabulary for later review. Many students also reported reading different types of materials and using techniques such as highlighting keywords, summarizing passages, and rereading difficult sections. These strategies reflect the use of strategic reading and autonomous learning practices, which are important for successful language learning.

Overall, although English-majored students recognize the importance of self-study in reading, they still encounter several linguistic and cognitive challenges. At the same time, the strategies they apply show their efforts to improve their reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers and institutions should provide more support in developing students' vocabulary knowledge, reading strategies, and independent learning skills to help them become more effective self-directed learners.

## Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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