FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR SELF-REGULATED LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Cao Thi Hong Phuong[1,*], Pham Xuan Tho[2]

[1]*Hanoi National University of Education, No.136 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*
[2]*Faculty of English Language and Culture VNU University of Languages and International Studies,
No.2 Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Abstract: Formative assessment (FA) is recognized for its potential to foster self-regulated learning (SRL). However, learner perspectives in exam-oriented English classrooms remain underexplored. This study investigates how English language teachers' formative assessment practices activate or constrain SRL mechanisms among students in two Vietnamese university settings. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the data were collected from 48 reflection papers and 12 semi-structured interviews and analyzed through content analysis guided by Gu's (2021) FA cycle. The findings indicated that formative practices, such as clarifying learning intentions, eliciting meaningful evidence, and providing actionable feedback supported key SRL mechanisms, including metacognitive awareness, strategic adaptation, and increased learner autonomy. However, opportunities for peer and self-feedback, revision, and follow-up actions were inconsistent, particularly in classrooms shaped by summative, exam-driven practices. These conditions were found to limit students' ability to interpret feedback, regulate their learning, or sustain improvement. The study argues that FA's potential to support SRL depends on the coherence with which teachers implement the full FA cycle. It also depends on the teachers' language assessment literacy required to cultivate dialogic, student-centered formative feedback practices. Implications are offered for teacher education and curriculum reform in exam-oriented EFL contexts.

Keywords: formative assessment, self-regulated learning, teacher education, Vietnamese English Language classroom, assessment reform

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* Corresponding author.
  Email address: hongphuongct@hnue.edu.vn

ĐÁNH GIÁ QUÁ TRÌNH TRONG VIỆC PHÁT TRIỂN NĂNG LỰC TỰ ĐIỀU CHỈNH HỌC TẬP TRONG GIÁO DỤC TIẾNG ANH: GÓC NHÌN CỦA SINH VIÊN

Cao Thị Hồng Phương[1], Phạm Xuân Thọ[2]

[1]Trường Đại học Sư phạm Hà Nội, Số 136 Xuân Thủy, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam
[2]Khoa Ngôn ngữ và Văn hóa Anh, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,
Số 2 Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Đánh giá quá trình được xem là một phương thức quan trọng trong việc thúc đẩy năng lực tự điều chỉnh học tập. Tuy nhiên, góc nhìn của sinh viên trong các lớp học tiếng Anh chịu ảnh hưởng mạnh của mục tiêu thi cử vẫn còn ít được nghiên cứu. Bài báo này tìm hiểu cách thức thực hành đánh giá quá trình của giảng viên, để xem liệu rằng các cách này hỗ trợ hoặc cản trở các cơ chế tự điều chỉnh học tập của sinh viên như thế nào trong hai bối cảnh đại học tại Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ 48 bài phản tư và 12 phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc, và được phân tích theo phương pháp phân tích nội dung dựa trên chu trình đánh giá quá trình của Gu (2021). Kết quả cho thấy các thực hành như: làm rõ mục tiêu học tập, thu thập minh chứng có ý nghĩa và cung cấp phản hồi mang tính hành động góp phần nâng cao nhận thức siêu nhận thức, điều chỉnh chiến lược và tăng tính tự chủ của người học. Tuy nhiên, sự thiếu nhất quán trong phản hồi đồng đẳng, tự phản hồi, hoạt động góp ý và theo dõi tiến bộ, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh bị chi phối bởi áp lực thi cử, đã hạn chế khả năng diễn giải phản hồi và duy trì sự cải thiện của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh rằng hiệu quả của đánh giá quá trình phụ thuộc vào mức độ giảng viên triển khai đầy đủ chu trình đánh giá, cũng như năng lực đánh giá ngôn ngữ của giảng viên, yếu tố cần thiết để xây dựng thực hành phản hồi mang tính đối thoại và lấy người học làm trung tâm. Những hàm ý được đề xuất cho đào tạo giảng viên và cải cách chương trình trong bối cảnh dạy học tiếng Anh thiên về định hướng thi cử.

Từ khóa: đánh giá quá trình, tự điều chỉnh học tập, đào tạo giảng viên, lớp học tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam, giáo dục đại học

1. Introduction

Formative assessment (FA) has been widely recognised as a key pedagogical tool for improving learning. Research suggests that when teachers clarify learning goals, elicit evidence of understanding, and provide formative feedback, students are better supported in monitoring their progress and directing subsequent learning processes (Gu, 2021; Leung, 2013; Wiliam, 2018). Formative assessment practices are believed to be especially important in English language teaching, where sustained language development requires continuous reflection, strategy use, and revision (Xiao & Yang, 2019). Although the value of FA has been well documented, classroom assessment in many EFL contexts remains dominated by high-stakes tests and product-oriented practices, leaving limited space for formative assessment.

Formative assessment is typically characterised by ongoing feedback, goal setting, and diagnostic use of evidence (Andrade et al., 2019). Through formative practices, learners are not only informed about their progress but are also encouraged to take ownership of their learning, develop metacognitive strategies, and make informed adjustments towards language

development goals. Despite this theoretical alignment, the practical integration of formative assessment to support SRL remains under-researched in contexts shaped by summative assessment practices. In Vietnam, for example, English language education has traditionally been driven by high-stakes testing and rigid curricular structures (Ngo & Tran, 2024; Ngo, 2024). While recent reforms have increasingly called for formative practices, such as those in the language policy documents promoting the use of formative assessment in English language education (MOET, 2003, 2016, 2018), classroom realities often reveal a disconnect between policy and implementation (Cao & Pham, 2024). Teachers may continue to prioritise exam preparation and grammar drills, leaving little space for the dialogic, student-centred practices that FA requires.

This study addresses the gap by investigating how formative assessment practices, as perceived by students, contribute to their self-regulated learning in English language education. The present study specifically explores how English language teachers' formative assessment practices support students' self-regulated learning in two Vietnamese university contexts. We drew on reflection papers and interview data to understand which formative practices students encountered, how these practices shaped their self-regulated learning, and where challenges remain. By bringing learner perspectives to the forefront, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of formative assessment in exam-oriented EFL settings. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What formative assessment practices did English language teachers employ in their classrooms, as perceived by students?

RQ2: Through which mechanisms did these practices foster students' self-regulated learning (SRL) in English language development, from the students' perspectives?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Formative Assessment in Language Education

Formative assessment (FA) has increasingly been recognised in English language education as an approach that supports learning rather than solely measuring attainment. FA is defined as a process in which teachers and learners clarify learning goals and success criteria, elicit and interpret evidence of understanding, provide formative feedback, and implement follow-up actions to close the gap between current and desired performance (Black & Wiliam, 2005; Gan & Lam, 2022). In English language classrooms, this process is implemented through practices such as teacher questioning, portfolios, whole-class reviews of common errors, rubrics, peer and self-assessment, and dialogues between teachers and students that emphasize improvement over evaluation (Hill & McNamara, 2012; Hill, 2012; Rea-Dickins, 2007). When integrated into daily instruction, these formative practices could transform assessment from a single snapshot event into an essential component of the learning process.

2.2. Self-regulated Learning and its Role in L2 Development

Self-regulated learning (SRL) provides a complementary lens for understanding how learners respond to formative opportunities. SRL is commonly defined as a self-directive, constructive process through which learners manage their cognition, motivation, and behaviour to achieve their meaningful goals (Zimmerman, 2002). It is also understood as a cyclical process, which comprises three interrelated phases. In the forethought phase, learners analyse tasks, set clear and attainable goals, such as consolidating vocabulary or improving coherence, and develop the motivational resources needed for engagement. During the performance phase,

students may select and apply strategies while monitoring comprehension, production, or progress on tasks. In the self-reflection phase, they evaluate their performance relative to goals, interpret reasons for success or difficulty, and determine adjustments for future learning (Granberg et al., 2021; Lam, 2014; Panadero, 2017). SRL is essential in L2 contexts because it enables learners to notice linguistic gaps, make sense of feedback, and generate targeted revisions that shape subsequent learning cycles (Li & Gu, 2024; Xiao & Yang, 2019).

2.3. Mechanisms Linking Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning

The relationship between FA and SRL is regarded as an interconnected process. FA provides the external structures, clarified expectations, elicited evidence, interpreted evidence, and feedback that learners need to regulate their own learning (Clark, 2012; Gu, 2021). At the same time, SRL describes the internal processes through which learners plan, monitor, and adjust their responses to that information (Li & Gu, 2024). Many authors, including Andrade and Heritage (2017), Teng and Zhang (2022), and Xiao and Yang (2019), describe this relationship as co-regulation when teachers support learning through formative assessment practices that gradually help students regulate their learning. Research identifies several mechanisms through which FA fosters SRL. First, clarifying goals and success criteria helps learners set attainable learning goals (Andrade & Heritage, 2017). Second, eliciting evidence through questions, drafts, or diagnostic tasks provides learners with information needed to monitor progress and recognise gaps (Panadero, 2017). Third, feedback, especially at the process and self-regulation levels (Hattie & Clarke, 2019), encourages learners to revise strategies, engage in deeper reasoning, and plan next steps. Empirical studies in EFL/ESL contexts suggest that formative assessment practices such as goal setting, self-assessment, and peer feedback can help promote metacognitive strategy use, enhance goal orientation, and improve language performance to move their learning closer to their intended targets (Li & Gu, 2024; Xiao & Yang, 2019). Students report becoming more capable of interpreting feedback from teachers, peers, and themselves and using it to form and inform learning in writing classes (Mak & Wong, 2018).

2.4. Formative Assessment in EFL Settings

Although the potential of FA is well documented in contexts that already value process-oriented learning, its implementation in exam-oriented systems is more constrained. In many Asian EFL settings, FA is often challenged by summative tests that prioritise accuracy and content coverage. For example, Xiao and Yang's (2019) study in a Chinese foreign language school illustrates both the potential and the limitations of formative assessment components. Oral presentations, student-generated quizzes, test follow-up lessons, and teacher-student dialogues provided students with learning opportunities to set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies, which are key features of SRL. However, opportunities for peer assessment or student-initiated action were found inconsistent in these contexts (Yan et al., 2021).

Similar tensions have been observed in Vietnamese higher education. Specifically, language assessment practices in many tertiary English classrooms continue to prioritise high-stakes tests, typically focused on discrete-point grammar and vocabulary (Le, 2024; Ngo, 2024). Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and strong exam pressures reduce teachers' capacity to conduct formative feedback (Cao & Pham, 2024). Although national policies endorse FA and call for more alternative forms of assessment, studies highlight a persistent gap between policy and classroom practice. Teachers often lack language assessment literacy for designing formative tasks or interpreting evidence beyond scoring. Because of this, learners may experience teacher-centred assessment practices (Tian et al., 2023), which in turns limits opportunities for SRL.

Despite growing international research, three gaps remain that directly motivate the present study. First, empirical studies on the integration between FA and SRL have largely been conducted in systems where formative approaches are already established, such as in Singapore, Hong Kong, and China (Berry, 2011; Cheong, 2018; Kaur, 2021; Xiao & Yang, 2019); far less is known about how FA operates in exam-driven university English classrooms in Vietnam. Second, most research in Vietnam has examined policy or teacher perspectives (Le, 2024), leaving a limited understanding of which formative practices students encounter and how these shape their efforts to regulate learning. Third, the perspectives of students, who will be future teachers and are more likely to shape their future assessment beliefs and practices (Cao & Pham, 2024), are largely absent from existing literature. Addressing these gaps requires student-centred perspectives into both the practices of FA employed by their teachers and the mechanisms through which these practices may foster or constrain SRL.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

To explore these questions, the present study adopts Gu's (2021) formative assessment framework as the analytical lense. Drawing on earlier FA theories (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Carless, 2011; Leung, 2004), Gu's model introduces key features particularly relevant to exam-oriented contexts. First, it specifies a full cycle of follow-up actions, emphasising learners' responsibility to act on feedback through revision, strategy adjustment, and independent problem solving. This process is aligned with the planning, monitoring, and reflection phases of SRL proposed by Panadero (2017), and Zimmerman (2002). Second, it underpins dual agency between teachers and learners who jointly clarify goals, elicit and interpret evidence, and decide on next steps. This also aligns with socio-constructivist views of learning as jointly constructed through interaction (Shabani & Hui, 2016) and with recent research on feedback literacy that highlights the importance of learners' uptake and taking actions towards their learning goals (Brooks et al., 2021; Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

Gu's model (Figure 1) can be both theoretically and practically employed in the Vietnamese university context. It is because this model was validated with Chinese context, which is similar to Vietnam in terms of assessment culture. This model also offers a practical way of coding as it can identify concrete components, clarifying success criteria, designing elicitation tasks, interpreting evidence, and structuring revision opportunities. Therefore, this framework could offer a coherent lense for identifying the formative assessment practices that students experience and tracing the mechanisms through which these practices foster the students' self-regulated learning.

Figure 1

Gu's (2021) Formative Assessment Framework
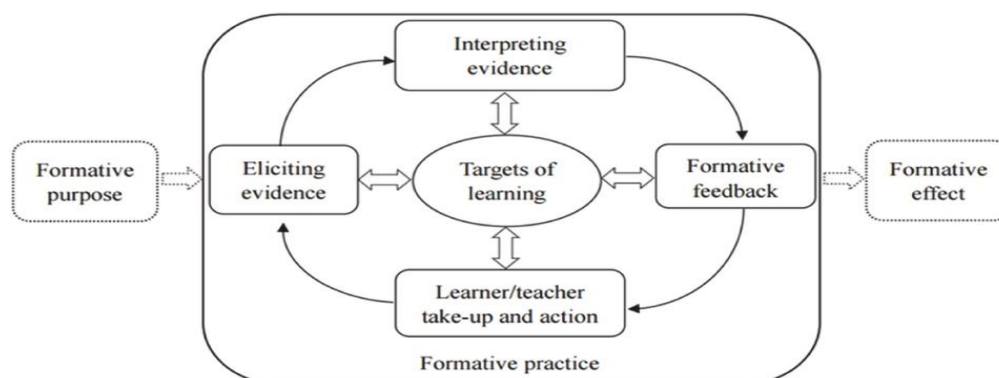
3. Methodology

The research was conducted at two teacher training universities in North Vietnam, where the participants were training to become future teachers. Both groups studied compulsory academic English courses as a requirement. We conveniently chose these two contexts to explain the variation in formative opportunities reported by students. The findings, therefore, reflected the practices of English language teachers in two teacher education universities and should not be interpreted as representing all Vietnamese tertiary institutions.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to capture students' lived experiences with formative assessment and its role in self-regulated learning in English language classrooms. A descriptive approach is suitable for studies that aim to provide a detailed account of classroom assessment practices from the learners' perspective, without imposing predefined evaluative judgments. Data were collected from reflection papers and semi-structured interviews, allowing students to describe formative assessment practices they encountered, how they interpreted feedback, and how they acted on it. Content analysis was used to identify formative assessment practices and the mechanisms through which these practices supported self-regulated learning. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue, qualitative research is suitable when scholars seek to describe and interpret participants' experiences in natural settings, rather than impose predetermined categories. In this study, students' experiences provided insight into how formative assessment practices were enacted in real classrooms and how they may have shaped self-regulated learning.

3.2. Research Participants

Participants were 48 Vietnamese students who were studying towards a bachelor's degree in English language education and other disciplines, including informatics, mathematics, and natural science-related disciplines. At the time of data collection, the students were between 20 and 22 years of age and had previously passed the same entrance exam in English. Among 48 students who participated in writing reflection papers, 22 students were English majors, studying toward a bachelor's degree in English language education. Their English proficiency is C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). 26 participants were non-English majors who were studying mathematics, information technology, and other social sciences. Their English proficiency ranges from 5.0 to 7.0. Participants were enrolled in compulsory English courses in two Vietnamese universities during a standard 15-week semester. Courses combined classroom tasks and written assignments; assessment included classroom activities and end-of-term tasks. Both cohorts took compulsory English courses; however, class size, stakes, and curricular aims differed. We therefore treat contrasts as contextual illustrations rather than causal comparisons. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in our study. Among 48 students, 12 of whom agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Details of the interview participants' demographic information are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic of the Interview Participants

Disciplines	Participants	Age	English proficiency
English major	Anna	22	IELTS 8.0
(n=6)	Lien	21	IELTS 7.0

	Thomas	21	IELTS 7.0
	Min	20	IELTS 7.5
	Marie	22	IELTS 7.0
	Fiona	20	IELTS 7.0
	Tim	21	CEFR C1
	Lan	20	IELTS 5.5
Non-English major (n=6)	Mai	21	IELTS 6.5
	Ly	20	IELTS 5.0
	Nguyen	22	IELTS 5.5
	Tran	22	IELTS 6.0

The population of this study were students who were being trained to become future teachers and were required to take compulsory English language courses as part of their programme. The study, therefore, targeted a population whose experiences with formative assessment are relevant to future classroom assessment practices in Vietnam. From this population, participants were purposefully recruited through convenience sampling from intact classes after institutional approval and student consent. This approach was appropriate because students were already organised into fixed class groups, and voluntary participation ensured ethical access. Although the sample cannot represent all Vietnamese university students, it provides situated insights into how FA is enacted in two tertiary educational contexts. Because participants were drawn from two universities, the findings reflect this population and should not be generalised to all Vietnamese tertiary settings.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the dataset consisted of written reflection papers and semi-structured interviews, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Both the reflection prompts, and the interview questions were adapted from Xiao and Yang (2019), whose instruments had been previously piloted and validated with Chinese participants. These tools were reviewed and revised to ensure relevance and appropriateness for the Vietnamese university context. All data were originally collected in the Vietnamese language during the first academic term of 2024. The reflection tasks asked students to recount and critically evaluate their English learning experiences across their educational settings, while the interviews provided opportunities to elaborate on those reflections.

Both the reflection prompts, and the interview questions were adapted from Xiao and Yang (2019). Their instruments were selected because they align conceptually with the focus of this study on formative assessment and self-regulated learning. However, several adaptations were made to suit the Vietnamese context and the goals of the present research. First, wording was simplified to ensure comprehensibility for students with differing English proficiency levels. Second, items referring to writing classes were replaced with more general prompts about classroom English language assessment practices, so that both English-major and non-major students could respond. Third, two new questions were added to invite students to describe how they used feedback to improve their work and whether they made independent decisions to revise or change strategies. These adaptations preserved the original intent of Xiao and Yang's instruments while ensuring contextual and linguistic appropriateness for the target population. A sample reflection prompt was: "*Describe a time when your teacher gave feedback that helped you improve your English competency? What did you do next*"? A sample interview question was: "*When you receive feedback, how do you decide what to revise or change in your English language learning*?". These adaptations allowed students to provide detailed accounts

of formative practices and the mechanisms through which these practices supported their self-regulated learning.

To ensure accuracy, the full dataset was translated into English using NVivo 15's integrated language tools and subsequently reviewed by the second author for linguistic fidelity and contextual clarity. The dual-stage translation process aimed to preserve the meaning of culturally embedded terms and learner experiences while preparing the data for English-medium analysis. A table summarising the reflection and interview protocols is included in Appendix to enhance methodological transparency.

Following transcription and translation, the dataset was also coded using NVivo 15. The coding process combined both top-down and bottom-up approaches. For the top-down categorization, Gu's (2021) framework was employed. The language competencies outlined as goals for tertiary teaching and learning in the Vietnamese curriculum standards served as the targets for learning, teaching, and assessment. For the bottom-up analysis, the exact responses from 48 papers and 12 interviews were examined. Once coding was completed, a tally of each code was conducted, and themes emerged, serving as an indicator of the students' self-regulated learning (SRL).

Data were analysed using content analysis. The process involved repeated reading for familiarisation, open coding of meaningful units, grouping of codes into categories, and development of themes corresponding to the research questions. To enhance reliability, the second author coded the full dataset, and the first author independently cross-checked 10% of the coded data. Coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. Inter-coder reliability was then assessed using NVivo queries. The agreement between the shared coded data showed high percentages (92.89% and 94.86%). Despite inter-coder reliability and consistency, we acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of the coding procedure. We organised the findings based on the major FA practices reported by two groups of students to answer the two research questions presented earlier. The first one presents (formative) assessment practices that teachers used, and the second theme focuses on how the participants perceived the impacts of their teachers' assessment practices on their SLR.

4. Key Findings

4.1. Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment Practices as Perceived by Students

This section presents the findings from the content analysis of the whole data set. The content analysis revealed clear differences between the two learning environments in terms of learning targets, forms of learning evidence, interpretation of performance, feedback practices, and follow-up actions. Table 2 summarises these practices and reflects the coded patterns found in the reflection papers. These dimensions also provide an initial lens on how formative opportunities are perceived by the students.

Table 2

Analysis of FA Practices Reported by the Students

Dimension	Non-English Major	English Major
Learning Targets	Implicit, exam-aligned	Explicit, curriculum-based
Learning Evidence	Worksheets, drills, exams, online quizzes	Projects, portfolios, online quizzes
Interpretation	Score-focused	Language-focused, developmental
Feedback Practices	Minimal, teacher-only	Peer, self, and teacher
Follow-Up Actions	Absent	Strategic, learner-initiated

Overall, English major learning environments fostered richer assessment practices, greater learner autonomy, and stronger feedback loops, marking a pedagogical evolution toward formative, skill-integrated, and student-centred learning. Table 3 also presents the findings from semi-structured interview data, illustrated by frequency counts. Both Table 2 and 3 will be referenced later for details presentation of findings, as perceived by the students. Details of the teachers' assessment practices will be presented in the following section, according to five components of Gu's (2021) formative assessment framework.

Table 3

The Frequency of FA Practices Used by the Teachers, Semi-Structured Interviews

Assessment Practices	Elaboration	English-Major (n=6)	Non-English Major (n=6)
		Frequency of mention	
Learning targets	Curriculum targets	4	2
	Course targets	0	0
	Unit targets	2	0
Eliciting learning evidence	Projects	5	2
	Work sheet	4	5
	Online quizzes	6	0
	Exam preparation	3	6
	Portfolios	6	0
Interpreting evidence	Language focused.	6	3
	Exam focused	2	6
Formative feedback	Peer feedback	6	1
	Self-feedback	6	2
	Teachers' feedback	3	1
Teacher/student follow-up actions	On the spot	3	2
	Delayed	4	3
	Planned	1	0

Component 1: Learning Targets

In the non-English major classrooms, learning targets were rarely communicated beyond overarching exam goals. The students often described their lessons as test-driven with unclear objectives. "*We didn't know what the lesson aimed to achieve, just followed the teacher's instructions and practice tests.*" Nguyen wrote in her reflection paper. Only 2 out of 26 participants from the non-English major group explicitly referred to curriculum targets, and none mentioned unit, or course-level goals. In contrast, English majors in university demonstrated higher awareness of instructional purposes. Four students referenced curriculum goals, and two cited specific unit objectives discussed in class. For example, Giang wrote in her reflection paper: "*In writing class, the teacher introduced the rubric and learning outcomes at the beginning, so we knew what to focus on.*" This finding suggests a difference between implicit, compliance-based learning in the non-English major classroom and more transparent and purposeful engagement by the teachers in the English major settings.

Component 2: Eliciting Learning Evidence

The non-English major participants overwhelmingly described worksheet-based tasks (see Table 2 for a summary) and exam preparation drills (26/26 reflection papers) as their primary learning activities. These assessments were typically teacher-controlled and oriented

toward testing formats. Ly wrote: "*We did worksheet after worksheet to prepare for the final exam, mostly grammar and vocabulary*." However, English-major students encountered a more diverse range of assessment tasks. All six reported completing online quizzes and compiling portfolios of their work. Five participated in projects such as video presentations, debates, and interviews tasks which required integration of multiple language skills. Tim wrote: "*We created videos, led discussions, and kept a reflection journal. It wasn't just about tests*." This contrast highlights a pedagogical difference between standardized knowledge elicitation and multi-modal, performance-based assessment, which may offer students richer opportunities to demonstrate applied competencies.

Component 3: Interpreting Learning Evidence

In non-English major classrooms, evidence of learning was primarily interpreted through test results. The majority (20/26) of students indicated that exam scores were the main, or only, basis for evaluating progress. Lan expressed her thought: "*Teachers only looked at the scores. Even if we improved our speaking, it didn't matter unless it showed in the test*." Language-focused interpretation was rare, with only three students reporting attention to communicative skills. In English major setting, the trend may be reversed, with 20 students indicating that learning evidence was assessed through language-focused criteria, including grammar accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, and content relevance. Min reflected: "*My teacher gave feedback on pronunciation, fluency, and how I organised ideas in my presentation*". This indicates a difference between summative evaluation and formative assessment of language development, which students perceived as more relevant and motivating.

Component 4: Formative Feedback

Feedback practices in non-English major classrooms were limited and largely teacher directed. Only one student mentioned receiving peer feedback, and two reported engaging in any form of self-reflection. Teacher feedback, when provided, was often generic. Lan remembered: "*If I made a mistake, the teacher just gave the answer. There wasn't any advice on how to improve*." In contrast, formative feedback was a defining feature of the English major experience. 23 English majors described receiving or giving peer feedback, and all reported using self-feedback techniques, such as journaling, rehearsal, and rubric-based reflection. "*We exchanged papers and commented on each other's work, sometimes it was even more helpful than the teacher's notes*." Giang reflected. Similarly, Fiona said: "*I watched a recording of my group's presentation and realized I was speaking too fast*." The findings show that teacher feedback was more individualized and formative, especially in writing and speaking classes. This signals a big gap between unidirectional correction and multi-source, dialogic feedback that promotes student self-regulation and metacognitive awareness.

Component 5: Follow-up Actions

For non-English major participants, follow-up actions after assessment were minimal. Students reported that feedback, if given, was often on-the-spot (2/6 interview participants) or delayed without structured support (3/6 interview participants). No students writing reflection papers described planned follow-up interventions. For example, Lien said: "*After the test, the teacher just corrected it in class. That was it, we didn't talk about how to fix our weaknesses*." In contrast, English major students actively used feedback to revise and prepare for future tasks. Three students in the interviews mentioned making on-the-spot corrections, four described delayed reflection or revision, and one highlighted a planned revision task in their course. Many stated that they "*wrote down all the comments from my midterm and used them to revise my*

final essay". Similarly, Nguyen reflected on her experience that "*before the next presentation, I read through my peer feedback to make sure I didn't repeat the same mistakes*". This progression may illustrate a capacity for self-regulated learning, moving beyond passive reception of feedback toward strategic, learner-driven action.

Taken together, the findings reveal a marked contrast in assessment practices by the teachers in the two educational contexts. In non-English major classrooms, assessment remained largely teacher-controlled and summative in nature, with minimal articulation of learning objectives and little provision for follow-up support. Feedback, when available, tended to be evaluative rather than instructional, offering limited scope for learner reflection or corrective action. By contrast, more comprehensive and student-centred assessment environment was found in the English major classrooms. Formative assessment practices were more systematically embedded, including the communication of clear learning targets, varied means of eliciting evidence, and a combination of peer, self, and teacher feedback. Learners in these contexts also reported engaging in self-initiated follow-up activities aimed at addressing performance gaps. This contrast reflects a broader pedagogical shift, from assessment as accountability toward assessment as learning support, fostering greater learner engagement, and enabling the development of self-regulated language learning.

4.2. How Formative Assessment Supports Students' Self-Regulated English Learning

Analysis of the reflection papers and interview data revealed marked differences in how formative assessment practices shaped students' development of self-regulated learning (SRL). Students in the English-major program consistently described assessment as a process that activated key SRL-supporting mechanisms, namely metacognitive awareness, strategic adaptation, increased motivation, and growing autonomy. In contrast, students in the non-English major classrooms experienced assessment largely as a summative requirement, limiting opportunities for reflection, strategic action, or independent learning. Table 4 summarizes these perceived impacts.

Table 4

Perceived Impact of Assessment Practices on SRL and Language Development

Themes	Non-English Major	English Major
Metacognitive Awareness	Limited reflection Unclear feedback	Reflection through peer/self-feedback
Strategy Use	Minimal adjustment	Active revision and resource seeking
Motivation and Confidence	Undermined by scores	Enhanced by formative feedback cycles
Ownership and Autonomy	Teacher-driven learning	Learner-initiated monitoring and goal setting

Theme 1: Metacognitive Awareness

Students' ability to understand and monitor their own learning, was markedly more developed among English majors. These students described how feedback, particularly from peers and self-evaluation tasks, helped them identify specific areas for improvement and formulate strategies for progress. For example, Giang wrote: "*After getting peer feedback, I understood why my presentation didn't go smoothly. I changed my way of rehearsing for the next one.*" Students also cited the use of rubrics and reflective journals to track growth and assess alignment with learning objectives. This type of feedback loop was largely absent among

non-English majors, who rarely engaged in reflective activities. "*If I got a low score, I just moved on to the next lesson. I didn't know what to do differently.*" Lan confessed. The contrast suggests that the presence of structured feedback and reflection mechanisms significantly contributes to learners' development of metacognitive skills.

Theme 2: Adaptation of Learning Strategies

Assessment also influenced students' capacity to adapt their learning strategies. English major students frequently described how feedback informed their revisions, both in writing and speaking, and led them to explore alternative study resources or techniques. "*After my teacher told me my writing lacked coherence, I learned how to use transitions more effectively.*" Minh reflected. Others reported practicing pronunciation, reorganizing speech content, or studying model answers to meet assessment criteria more effectively. In contrast, non-English major students tended not to link assessment outcomes with strategic change. "*Sometimes I got good marks, sometimes not. I don't think I changed anything in how I studied.*", Lien said in the interview. This finding illustrates the role of formative assessment in prompting goal-oriented behaviours, where learners adjust their methods in pursuit of improved performance.

Theme 3: Motivation and Confidence Through Feedback Cycles

Students in the English-major context perceived feedback as a source of motivation, particularly when it highlighted progress or affirmed their effort. These learners viewed assessment as a dialogue rather than an endpoint. "*When my teacher highlighted my vocabulary choice as a strength, I felt really encouraged to keep trying.*" Thomas said. The availability of multiple feedback points throughout a course was seen to sustain engagement and reinforce a growth-oriented mindset. Conversely, students in non-English major classrooms often described assessment as demotivating, especially when feedback was minimal or solely focused on scores. "*Even when I improved, the score didn't show it, so I lost interest.*" Ann confessed. This suggests that the emotional impact of assessment is closely tied to how feedback is framed and whether it supports learner agency.

Theme 4: Ownership and Self-Regulation in Learning

A defining characteristic of English major students' experiences was their growing sense of ownership over learning. They described using feedback to revise, prepare ahead of deadlines, and set personal improvement goals. "*Now I'm more independent. I don't wait for the teacher to tell me what to fix. I try to find out myself.*" My Duyen wrote. Such accounts illustrate the development of self-regulated behaviors aligned with autonomous language learning. In contrast, students in the non-English major group described assessment as teacher-directed, with little initiative taken beyond compliance with task requirements.

Across the dataset, it became clear that formative assessment practices activated key mechanisms that support SRL, including improved awareness of learning needs, purposeful strategy adjustment, motivational reinforcement, and growing learner ownership. These mechanisms were consistently observed among English-major students, whose learning environments offered clearer targets, diverse evidence, and multiple forms of feedback. Conversely, the exam-driven nature of the non-English major classrooms limited the same mechanisms. Scores functioned as end points rather than starting points for improvement, providing little opportunity for reflection or self-directed action. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that students perceive formative, feedback rich, and dialogic assessment environments as far more conducive to the development of SRL. Where assessment was

summative and teacher-controlled, opportunities for SRL development were significantly restricted. These contrasts highlight the crucial role of assessment design, and particularly the availability of feedback and follow-up actions, in shaping learners' capacity to plan, monitor, and regulate their English language learning.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study examined how formative assessment (FA) practices enacted by English language teachers supported students' self-regulated learning (SRL) in two Vietnamese universities. Although participants came from different programme types, the analysis does not interpret their experiences as programme effects. Instead, contextual variation is used solely to deepen understanding of how specific FA practices activated or failed to activate the mechanisms of SRL. This approach aligns with Gu's (2021) conceptualisation of FA as a dynamic, cyclical process through which learners clarify goals, interpret evidence, receive feedback, and take follow-up action.

Across the data, FA supported SRL when teachers enacted the FA cycle coherently and purposefully. Four mechanisms consistently emerged: metacognitive awareness, strategic adaptation, motivation, and learner autonomy. These mechanisms align closely with Zimmerman's (2002) phases of forethought (goal setting and planning), performance (strategy use and monitoring), and self-reflection (evaluation and adjustment). The findings affirm the broader conclusion that FA influences learning not through single formative assessment techniques (Panadero, 2017). When parts of the FA cycle were missing, such as unclear goals, limited evidence interpretation, or no structured follow-up, SRL processes may remain underdeveloped.

The extent to which teachers clarified learning intentions strongly influenced students' ability to plan and regulate learning. Clear targets, rubrics, and shared criteria enabled students to understand expectations, monitor progress, and evaluate the quality of their performance. These findings reflect earlier work showing that explicit goal structures are central to SRL activation (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016; Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Panadero et al., 2014). Consistent with Li and Gu's (2024) study, goal clarity helped students move beyond task completion towards purposeful, criteria-driven learning, a precondition for meaningful self-regulation.

One of the strongest mechanisms supporting SRL was dialogic feedback. Peer feedback, self-assessment helped students internalise the criteria, evaluate their own performance, and make informed adjustments. These findings support Carless's (2011) position that distributed feedback builds evaluative judgment more powerfully than teacher-dominated correction. They also echo Li and Gu (2024), who found that strategic engagement with feedback was central to SRL development. Nonetheless, some students reported superficial or procedural feedback practices, reflecting the challenges noted by Gan and Lam (2022) regarding teachers' insufficiency of language assessment literacy. Where feedback lacked specificity for uptake, SRL mechanisms weakened accordingly.

Follow-up actions, revision, deliberate practice, and goal resetting represented the most decisive mechanisms linking FA to SRL. Students who were supported to act on evidence described revising drafts, rehearsing presentations, and preparing proactively for subsequent tasks. These behaviours illustrate the iterative SRL cycle described by Zimmerman (2002). Conversely, when feedback was not accompanied by structured opportunities for uptake, students treated it as evaluative, summative rather than developmental. This finding reinforces the argument made by Gu (2021) that FA's impact depends on completing the full cycle;

without follow-up, FA might become disconnected techniques. Students may not know where they are in the learning, and do not know where to go next.

Taken together, the findings show that FA can foster SRL in meaningful ways, but only when teachers enact the FA cycle coherently, including clarifying goals, eliciting and interpreting rich evidence, providing actionable feedback, and enabling sustained follow-up. These elements interact to generate mechanisms, such as awareness, strategy use, motivation, autonomy, which underpins self-regulated learning. Echoing Li and Gu (2024) and Gu and Lam (2023), the findings highlight the central role of teacher assessment literacy. Without explicit guidance and institutional support, formative practices may remain fragmented, shaped by prevailing exam-oriented traditions rather than developmental intentions. Strengthening FA as a mechanism for SRL, therefore, may require coherent efforts of multiple stakeholders who are engaged in teacher education, curriculum design, and policy implementation to shift assessment from judging learning to supporting it.

The findings also indicate that FA influenced learning not through individual techniques, but through the mechanisms it activated. These mechanisms emerged when teachers enacted the FA by clarifying learning intentions, eliciting and interpreting evidence, providing actionable feedback, and creating opportunities for follow-up action. When any stage of this cycle was absent, students may have had fewer chances to work with feedback in reflective and strategic ways. The results also suggest that FA needs to be deliberately embedded in curriculum design, teacher education, and actual classroom practices. Strengthening teacher assessment literacy is essential so that FA can move beyond procedural compliance and become a meaningful driver of SRL in exam-oriented contexts. Assessment practices, such as reflection, and revision, portfolios, peer review, and self-assessment, are particularly valuable. The study is limited by its focus on two institutions and its reliance on student self-reports. Future research should include classroom observations, teacher perspectives, and longitudinal designs to capture how FA practices evolve over time and interact with institutional conditions. Overall, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to shift assessment practices from measuring learning to supporting learning. When implemented as an interactive and sustained process, formative assessment can help learners develop more reflective, strategic, and autonomous capacities that are crucial for both language development and lifelong learning.

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APPENDIX

Summary of Reflection and Interview Protocols

Instrument	Purpose	Sample Prompts/Questions	Adapted From
Reflection Paper	To elicit students' personal experiences with assessment practices and their perceived impact on English learning and self-regulation	- Describe how your English teachers assessed your learning in your English classrooms? - How did these assessments/practices influence your learning behaviours, motivation and goals? - What kind of feedback did you receive? Was it helpful? Why or why not?	Xiao and Yang (2019) adapted for Vietnamese tertiary context
Semi-Structured Interview	To explore and clarify students' responses in the reflection paper through in-depth discussion	- What assessment activities did your teachers frequently use? - Can you give an example of a time when feedback helped (or didn't help) you improve? - How do you set goals or plan for improvement after an assessment?	