
Self-Regulated Online Learning of Rural University EFL Students

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Abstract

It is undisputable that learning English through an online course remains challenging for most rural university learners. This study was focused on determining various self-regulation strategies during an online course employed by EFL learners from several universities located in rural areas. A total of 137 learners in 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th semesters voluntarily participated in the online survey study for several weeks. The results revealed that there were several general strategies applied by the learners, including metacognitive skills, time management, environmental structuring, persistence, and help seeking strategies. Among them were time management and environmental structuring strategies which reduce the improvement learners' self-regulation. In short, self-regulated learning is much influenced by learners' attitude and competence to integrate technology into online course that is mostly new in the rural context.

Keywords: Online learning, self-regulated learning, EFL students

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1. Introduction

Self-regulated online learning (SROL) refers to the process in which learners take responsibility for their own learning in an online environment. It involves setting goals, planning how to achieve those goals, monitoring progress, and reflecting on the learning process such as in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Liu et al., 2024; Rosenthal et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Self-regulated EFL learners typically exhibit behaviors such



as setting clear learning objectives, selecting appropriate learning strategies, managing their time effectively, seeking help when needed, and evaluating their learning outcomes. In the context of online learning, self-regulation becomes even more crucial due to the increased autonomy and flexibility that online learning environments offer. EFL learners must be able to manage their time effectively, stay motivated, and overcome challenges independently (Hsu et al., 2023). Some strategies to promote self-regulated learning in an online environment include providing clear learning objectives and expectations, offering opportunities for self-assessment and reflection, fostering a supportive learning community, and providing timely feedback (Broadbent et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the practice of SROL does not always result in successful English learning. The EFL learners in rural context are faced with several barriers which require them to struggle with such learning mode. To begin, technological issue is the most common barrier encountered by rural EFL learners (Chang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2020). Motivated learners may reduce their motivation to attend an online course due to poor internet connectivity. The internet connection serves as a basic requirement for online learning, because if not, further learning process will receive worse impacts. Limited access to learning devices such as laptop, computer, projector, or smartphone is considered as important issue faced by most EFL learners in rural context. Unavailability of technological devices has become another common issue as not all labs provide such devices for online learning.

Meanwhile, learning English online leads to lack of course structure if compared to that in conventional learning process (i.e., brainstorming, material delivery and development, evaluation, and feedback). In English course, the EFL learners are provided with structural learning stages that enable them to enhance knowledge more effectively. Online learning seems to modify the stages into unstructured process (Radović et al., 2024; Ahmad & Alqarni Akis, 2023). It may be started from task completion or material delivery without any introducing stage. A negative impact of this challenge is that rural EFL learners are not used to controlling over online time management or multiple tasks systematically. Such time management requires the learners to have higher self-discipline and self-regulation when learning English online (Zheng et al., 2023). Hence, conventional methods applied in most courses tend to discourage rural EFL learners' possibility to be engaged with online learning. This problem has to be solved with self-regulation strategies from the learners even when they are in rural learning context.

Interestingly, a plethora of previous studies (Alotumi, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Öztürk & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Peng et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2023; Yang & Zhang, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024) may have attracted the construction of this current study. It resulted in specific differences with those conducted earlier. For example, it employed several groups of EFL learners who were studying English in rural universities. This uniqueness is simply dealt with

how rural EFL learners with limited learning tools were challenged to learn English through online mode themselves. Meanwhile, there were not many studies which focused on rural context as offered in this current study. Another newness is that it encouraged online learning regulation of the EFL learners whose daily was managed with conventional learning. It is interesting to reveal that the rural learners have their own learning habits and specific environment. Their interaction with online mode may not be habitual for most of them. Therefore, this study provided different form of attitudes towards how they managed their own online learning process.

In this study, a question was designed to help the researcher provides the focus, as follows: How do the rural university EFL learners perceive self-regulation strategies during online learning course?

1.1. Self-regulated learning

Self-regulated online learning has become a fundamental aspect of modern education in a time when digital technology is widespread and education goes beyond traditional limits. This review thoroughly explores the complex domain of self-regulated online learning, assessing its effectiveness, difficulties, and capacity to promote academic achievement (Hertel et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). Self-regulated online learning refers to the active process in which learners assume responsibility for their education, independently overseeing different areas of their learning experience. This technique allows individuals to customize their learning experiences, speed, and strategies based on their specific requirements and preferences, in contrast to typical classroom environments. It includes a range of actions, such as creating goals, managing time, using resources effectively, and monitoring one's own thinking, all done through digital platforms and resources (Willems et al., 2021).

The efficacy of self-regulated online learning resides in its capacity to foster essential competencies such as self-control, self-drive, and self-consciousness. Studies suggest that individuals who actively govern their own online learning experience demonstrate superior academic performance, improved critical thinking skills, and better retention of course content (Aheto et al., 2024; Çakiroğlu et al., 2024; Solihah, 2023). Furthermore, the adaptability provided by online platforms allows individuals to manage their educational endeavors alongside their personal and professional responsibilities, thereby making education more accessible to all and promoting continuous learning throughout one's life.

Although self-regulated online learning has the potential to offer numerous advantages, it is not devoid of difficulties. An important challenge is that learners must have a specific level of digital literacy and self-regulatory skills, which may be lacking in particular demographic groups. Furthermore, the lack of direct interpersonal communication with teachers and classmates results in a sense of seclusion and impede opportunities for cooperative learning (Kic-Drgas & Kılıçkaya, 2024; Lan & Huang, 2023). Moreover, the widespread

presence of online diversions presents a continuous risk to maintaining long-term involvement and concentration, requiring proactive measures to reduce mental strain and uphold efficiency.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of self-regulated online learning, both educators and learners utilize several optimal methods and approaches. Establishing precise objectives, regularly evaluating one's progress, and implementing a well-organized schedule are crucial for sustaining motivation and responsibility. By using a variety of multimedia resources, creating virtual communities of practice, and including interactive aspects in online courses, they increase participation and promote more profound learning experiences (Lan & Huang, 2023). Moreover, it is crucial to prioritize the development of a growth mentality and the creation of a supportive learning environment in order to enhance resilience and persistence when confronted with difficulties.

The future of self-regulated online learning offers great potential as technology continues to advance and transform the educational field. The progress in artificial intelligence, adaptive learning algorithms, and personalized learning platforms enhance the learning process by customizing information and interventions to cater to individual learning requirements. In addition, the incorporation of immersive technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality has the potential to completely transform online education by offering immersive and interactive learning environments that beyond the constraints of conventional teaching methods (Pogorskiy & Beckmann, 2023).

Self-regulated online learning is a transformative approach to education that enables learners to assume responsibility for their own learning process and adjust to the requirements of the digital era (Kic-Drgas & Kılıçkaya, 2024). Despite ongoing obstacles, the advantages of this strategy are indisputable, including adaptability, availability, and individualized learning opportunities. By adopting effective strategies and utilizing new technology, teachers and learners fully utilize self-regulated online learning, leading to a more inclusive, interactive, and effective educational environment.

1.2. Online learning

Online learning has become a powerful force in education, revolutionizing the acquisition, distribution, and application of information in the aftermath of the digital revolution. This review provides a thorough examination of the ever-changing field of online learning, evaluating its effectiveness, consequences, and future potential in the field of education. Online learning has developed from its early beginnings in mail courses to sophisticated digital platforms and virtual classrooms (Kic-Drgas & Kılıçkaya, 2024; Lan & Huang, 2023). It is sometimes referred to as e-learning or distance education. Technology breakthroughs, widespread high-speed internet connection, and the widespread use of digital devices have

made it possible for online learning to overcome geographical and temporal obstacles, democratizing access to education on a worldwide scale.

An increasing amount of data confirms the effectiveness and advantages of online learning in a variety of educational settings (Cheng et al., 2023; Tarchi et al., 2022). Research shows that learners who learn online frequently achieve academically on par with or even better than those who learn in traditional classroom environments. A culture of lifelong learning and skill development is fostered by the flexibility of online learning, which allows learners to customize their educational experiences to fit in with their personal and professional obligations. Additionally, online learning accommodates different learning styles and preferences by providing chances for asynchronous collaboration, adaptive feedback mechanisms, and individualized training (Núñez et al., 2023).

Online learning has drawbacks and considerations despite its apparent benefits. The gaps in internet access, technological aptitude, and digital literacy exacerbate educational attainment imbalances, contributing to the ongoing existence of the digital divide. Furthermore, the lack of in-person engagement in virtual learning settings might hinder interpersonal relationship development, socializing, and communication skills. Furthermore, there are constant obstacles for educators and institutions to overcome in order to guarantee the quality and integrity of online education, including requirements for accreditation, academic integrity, and assessment procedures (K.-Z. Chen & Li, 2021; Ingkavara et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023).

A variety of best practices and tactics can be used by educators and instructional designers to maximize the efficacy of online learning. Effective communication, thoughtfully created course materials, and captivating multimedia resources are crucial for preserving learners' motivation and involvement. Including interactive components like discussion boards, online role-playing games, and group projects encourage active learning and knowledge creation. Furthermore, giving learners lots of chances for peer review, self-evaluation, and feedback helps them track their development, pinpoint areas for growth, and develop metacognitive abilities (Y.-M. Chen et al., 2023). Online learning has a bright future ahead of it as technology develops and shapes the educational environment. With the ability to provide adaptive interventions, individualized learning experiences, and data-driven decision-making, developments in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and learning analytics have the potential to completely transform online education. Furthermore, gamification, augmented reality, and virtual reality are examples of immersive technologies that can be used to further improve the engagement and authenticity of online learning environments, changing the way knowledge is learned and applied.

An exciting new era of accessibility, flexibility, and creativity in education is being ushered in by online learning. Even though there are still difficulties, there are indisputable advantages to online learning, including the chance for learners to overcome socioeconomic,

temporal, and geographic limitations. The full potential of online learning can be realized by educators and institutions by embracing best practices, utilizing cutting-edge technologies, and encouraging a culture of continuous development (Chang et al., 2022). This will enable learners to flourish in the digital age and beyond.

1.3. Learning English in rural context

Being the universal language of the world, English is extremely important since it opens doors to possibilities in communication, work, and education across borders. Accessing high-quality English language instruction, however, can be difficult in rural areas for a variety of reasons related to socioeconomic, infrastructural, and cultural concerns (Ben-Eliyahu et al., 2024). A distinct set of difficulties arises when learning English in rural areas because of socioeconomic differences, restricted access to educational resources, and cultural considerations. Many rural schools might not have the modern teaching resources, technology infrastructure, or certified English language teachers needed for successful language learning. Further socio-cultural elements that may affect learners' motivation, confidence, and participation in English language learning activities include linguistic variety, low literacy rates, and traditional views towards education.

In spite of these obstacles, academics and decision-makers have created creative ways to support efficient English language teaching in rural areas. Peer tutoring, language clubs, and after-school programmes are examples of community-based programmes that boost learners' exposure to English outside of the classroom and offer additional support (Jansen et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2021). By utilizing mobile learning applications, open educational resources, and digital technologies, English language training can be expanded to include remote locations with little access to traditional education (Saha, 2023). Incorporating experiential learning activities, culturally relevant content, and real-world applications of English language proficiency also improve learners' motivation, relevance, and retention.

The empowerment of teachers and communities as important stakeholders is essential to the success of English language learning programmes in rural areas. Giving teachers access to instructional resources, mentorship support, and professional development opportunities provide them the tools they need to educate English language learners in a variety of classroom environments. In addition, the development of partnerships among educational institutions, community organizations, and local stakeholders effectively use their combined resources, skills, and support systems to establish a favorable learning atmosphere for English language learners residing in rural locations (Saha, 2023; Sharif & Channa, 2022).

In rural areas, there are opportunities and obstacles for educators, governments, and communities looking to close the language gap and open doors to socioeconomic growth related to learning English. Through the implementation of creative tactics, empowering

educators and communities, and advocating for fairness and inclusivity, stakeholders may establish a conducive atmosphere in which every learner, irrespective of location or financial background, can obtain high-quality English language instruction (Sharif & Channa, 2022).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants ($n=137$)

Demography		Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	59	43.1%
	Female	78	56.9%
Semester	1 st	23	16.8%
	3 rd	17	12.4%
	5 th	54	39.4%
	7 th	43	31.4%
Age	19-20	40	29.2%
	21-22	97	70.8%
Online course experience	Low	103	75.2%
	High	34	24.8%
University	Public	86	62.8%
	Private	51	37.2%

This study employed 137 learners who were learning English in some rural universities. They were registered in semester 1, 3, 5, and 7. Their ages ranged from 19, 20, 21, and 22. As for experience level in online learning course, 75.2% of them have lower experiences, while 24.8% have some experiences to use online tools for learning English. The experience level was acknowledged through an interview with some participants. It was counted by determining whether or not they were engaged with online learning tools. As for gender, 43.1% of the participants were male EFL learners, while 56.9% were female learners. Meanwhile, the scope of rural context leads to a university surrounded by farming area or livestock.

2.2. Instrument

As a survey study with quantitative approach, the instrument used was Self-Regulated Online Learning Questionnaire (SOL). This scale helped the researcher to find out specific strategies used by the rural EFL learners during online course. The strategies stated in the scale are determined from previous self-regulated online learning phenomenon which may be significant as a source for other learners in similar context. SOL comprises five strategies, including metacognitive skills, time management, environmental structuring, persistence, and help seeking strategies. Although each strategy has specific reliability level, the overall internal consistency of this scale is .902 which reveals it has higher level of reliability.

2.3. Data collection

Quantitative data were collected through an online survey. To begin, I asked every participant whether they chose the scale to be provided in English or Indonesian version through a quick online survey. Surprisingly, 87.6% (n=120) of them expected an Indonesian version as it allowed them to understand each item meaning more clearly. They were worried about the English version that may lead to misunderstanding towards proposed meaning. Having received the responses, two professors in English and one in Indonesian were purposely involved in translating the English version into Indonesian. Its purpose was to ensure that the participants figured out each meaning before they decided to point on a choice. Another step was to send an informed consent to every participant as evidence that they were able to participate in the survey voluntarily and were able to engaged in the study until it completely finished. A number of 137 participants signed the consents and resubmitted to the researcher.

The main step to collect the data for this current study was by delivering the questionnaire via email to every participant. A Google Form was utilized to enhance the process of scale completion. From 137 questionnaire, there were similar number of results submitted by the participants via the online form. It is case, no participant missed the completion. It means that all participants agreed with the consent signed before.

2.4. Data analysis

The data collected were transmitted into raw data materials that led to categorical items. To do this, the first step was categorizing each data from the online form. The categories consisted of five dimensions based on the scale, including metacognitive skills, time management, environmental structuring, persistence, and help seeking dimension. When the data were completely categorized, a statistical analysis was run. The research questions were answered by performing means or percentages to overall collected data. The step was followed by presenting statistical result based on the questions. The final step was to add detailed description on self-regulated online learning of rural EFL learners.

3. Results

This subsection reveals statistical results represented by descriptive analysis in terms of percentages. Each dimension of SOL including metacognitive skills, time management, environmental structuring, persistence, and help seeking was presented in form of a table respectively. Qualitative description was added to each table which increases its clarity and trustworthiness.

Table 2. Descriptive results of metacognitive skills strategy

No	Items	Options						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	I think about what I really need to learn before I begin a task in this online course.	42.3	1.6	14	31.8	2.3	2.1	5.9

2.	I ask myself questions about what I am to study before I begin to learn for this online course.	5.6	-	9.6	-	-	33.6	51.2
3.	I set short-term (daily or weekly) goals as well as long-term goals (monthly or for the whole online course).	25	7.3	22	-	13.7	24.2	7.8
4.	I set goals to help me manage my studying time for this online course.	3.9	25.6	3.6	1.4	12.2	30	23.3
5.	I set specific goals before I begin a task in this online course.	-	41.3	6.2	-	24	8.9	19.6
6.	I think of alternative ways to solve a problem and choose the best one for this online course.	38	3.2	13	2.2	-	15.5	28.1
7.	I try to use strategies in this online course that have worked in the past.	26.3	-	32.7	-	11.6	29.4	-
8.	I have a specific purpose for each strategy I use in this online course.	8.7	6.3	5	15.8	10.4	52.1	1.7
9.	I am aware of what strategies I use when I study for this online course.	21	3.3	-	1.9	29	-	44.8
10.	Although we don't have to attend daily classes, I still try to distribute my studying time for this online course evenly across days.	5.5	-	35	26.5	13	10.1	9.9
11.	I periodically review to help me understand important relationships in this online course.	9.8	6.3	6.6	-	36.8	22	18.5
12.	I find myself pausing regularly to check my comprehension of this online course.	-	38.4	-	18.7	19	3.9	20
13.	I ask myself questions about how well I am doing while learning something in this online course.	43.4	-	35.6	-	2.1	-	18.9
14.	I think about what I have learned after I finish working on this online course.	18.2	3.2	22.1	3.6	1.8	1.5	49.6
15.	I ask myself how well I accomplished my goals once I'm finished working on this online course.	4.2	-	36.5	-	35	24.3	-
16.	I change strategies when I do not make progress while learning for this online course.	42.5	5.8	11.3	2.7	3.5	34.2	-
17.	I find myself analyzing the usefulness of strategies while I study for this online course.	20.6	17	1.9	-	-	5.6	71.9
18.	I ask myself if there were other ways to do things after I finish learning for this online.	35.2	5.4	-	15	24.5	-	19.9

"not all true for me (1)" to "very true for me (7)"

The EFL learners tended to avoid what was scheduled for them to learn before an online course (42.3%). They only asked themselves what they wanted to learn (51.2%), but did not

pay attention to what the lecturer prepared. Some learners (25%) prepared learning sources either daily or weekly to allow them focus on the course. It proved that they focused on a goal while learning English online (30%). Hence, the goal remained general and they did not set a more specific one as a final target on online learning (41.3%). This problem led to a lack of awareness to determine problem solving strategies that help them cope with online learning barriers (38%).

If they were asked to use a strategy during the online course, they would like to set a focus for each strategy (52.1%). It is because they were certain that a focused strategy helped to consider how it is applied and why it is important to use such strategy in a rural context (44.8%). One of the popular strategies was reviewing what has been learnt in the online course (36.8%). Those who kept monitoring their online learning were able to improve English comprehension (38.4%). Meanwhile, many learners (43.4%) did not allow themselves to review what had not been achieved so far and what had been succeeded. Online learning was considered to be successful when the rural EFL learners repeated learning the material delivered during the online course (49.6%). Another indicator of success is that they were aware of failure and they suddenly switched on other related strategies (42.5%) that enabled them to finish working on the online course materials and evaluation (71.9%).

Table 3. Descriptive results of time management strategy

No	Items	Options						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	I find it hard to stick to a study schedule for this online course.	5	-	2.5	12.3	20	11.2	61.2
20.	I make sure I keep up with the weekly readings and assignments for this online course.	56.3	13.3	-	6.6	6.8	10	7
21.	I often find that I don't spend very much time on this online course because of other activities.	66.8	4.6	3.2	-	5.6	9.8	10

“not all true for me (1)” to “very true for me (7)”

The importance of management during online learning process needs to be noticed by both rural EFL learners. It is because they are used to applying conventional learning procedures which allow them to learn as general learning rules suggest. Most rural learners (61.2%) found it laborious to prepare and follow online learning procedures that may be new for them. Nevertheless, required efforts such as reading English text regularly and completing assignment purposively were not yet applied by the learners (56.3%). They seem to neglect the need for such reading and exercise before and after the online course. There were many learners (66.8%) who did not attend the course effectively as they were stuck to other routines and activities that may not be related to their academic online learning.

Spots for learning English during online course among rural EFL learners are influential to achieve success. Learning English online was new for most rural learners as they did not have sufficient experience with online tools and experiences. A number of learners (87.6%) considered a particular learning spot before online course began. It was proposed to avoid themselves from unimportant distractors such as noises or crowds. Many learners were not able to study under unneeded disturbances even though others do not have a problem with it.

Table 4. Descriptive results of environmental structuring strategy

No	Items	Options						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	I choose the location where I study for this online course to avoid too much distraction.	-	5.5	-	6.9	38	24.1	25.5
23.	I find a comfortable place to study for this online course.	41.7	6.5	3.1	6.5	22	14.6	5.6
24.	I know where I can study most efficiently for this online course.	38.3	33.5	-	2.1	23.3	2.8	-
25.	I have a regular place set aside for studying for this online course.	49	-	-	35.3	15.7	-	-
26.	I know what the instructor expects me to learn in this online course.	28.6	18	2.5	2.9	14.2	30	3.8

“not all true for me (1)” to “very true for me (7)”

Meanwhile, other learners (41.7%) were not motivated to find out a safe spot during online course. This group of rural learners was not influenced by particular spot like the previous group. A tangible reason was that they did not try to determine any efficient or effective spot for online learning (38.3%). This finding is similar to other learners who considered online learners can learn in various places without any exception (49%). As a consequence, many learners (28.6%) had no idea about what their lecturer expects from them during the online course.

Table 5. Descriptive results of persistence strategy

No	Items	Options						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	When I am feeling bored studying for this online course, I force myself to pay attention.	3.9	6.8	-	35.6	44	-	9.7
28.	When my mind begins to wander during a learning session for this online course, I make a special effort to keep concentrating.	50	3.8	-	6.8	-	28	11.4
29.	When I begin to lose interest for this online course, I push myself even further.	63.5	-	-	-	3.8	29.9	2.8
30.	I work hard to do well in this online course even if I don't like what I have to do.	8.8	5.8	6.4	12.7	3.5	20	42.8

31.	Even when materials in this online course are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish.	24.6	25.1	-	15	2	3.5	29.8
<i>“not all true for me (1)” to “very true for me (7)”</i>								

Learning English online is much related to how far the learners are able to cope with persistence. Research findings showed that persistence among the participants varied in terms of perceptions and strategies. More learners (44%) had a particular strategy to avoid any boredom. They believed that online learning boredom can be solved by directing themselves to focus on course material delivery. Another new strategy is needed to help the learners increase concentration during online course.

However, half a number of them (50%) did not pay attention to any strategy that may enable them to encourage learning motivation and focus. Even when the rural EFL learners had no interest in learning English online, they never let themselves go to helpful strategy (63.5%). Fortunately, some of them (42.8%) were aware of hard work and intensive effort as they were challenged with online course with its complex procedures. Moreover, the learners who struggled to comprehend online materials and encourage themselves to finish a class more properly may determine strategies or techniques needed during the online course (29.8%).

Table 6. Descriptive results of help seeking strategy

No	Items	Options						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32.	When I do not fully understand something, I ask other course members in this online course for ideas.	52	-	3.4	15.8	12	-	16.8
33.	I share my problems with my classmates in this course online so we know what we are struggling with and how to solve our problems.	10.6	12.6	36.5	-	3.9	6	30.4
34.	I am persistent in getting help from the instructor of this online course.	38	6.5	13.5	10	2.5	1	28.5
35.	When I am not sure about some material in this online course, I check with other people.	20.8	-	10.5	16	4.5	2.1	46.1
36.	I communicate with my classmates to find out how I am doing in this online course.	24.8	1.5	11.4	32.2	4.1	2.2	23.8
<i>“not all true for me (1)” to “very true for me (7)”</i>								

An interesting fact about online learning is that most rural EFL learners were not encouraged to work collaboratively before, during, or after an online course. It is noted that 52% learners did not attempt to figure out related information about what they did not understand from course material. Collaborative work seems to be less important in online

learning as more numbers of learners (59.7%) believed that learning English online did not have to be dealt with enlisting a problem and find out an appropriate solution.

Lecturer was not considered as a support when the learners were facing a problem during online course (38%). They acted like a controller for themselves as they did not need any assistance from the lecturer. This phenomenon was entailed by rural learners' attitude to neglect lecturer's explanation towards unclear English learning materials during the course (46.1%). Fortunately, a number of learners (32.2%) chose to discuss online learning process with their classmates before an online lecturer started.

4. Discussion

Online learning has become a powerful force in the field of education, providing rural university EFL learners with the advantages of flexibility, accessibility, and the ability to study independently. However, in order to genuinely flourish in online learning environments, the learners utilize strong metacognitive skill techniques. Metacognition, which refers to the capacity to observe and control one's own cognitive processes, is of utmost importance in online education, where self-regulation and independent study are essential. To begin, goal setting is a vital part of metacognition in online learning (Broadbent et al., 2023; Y.-M. Chen et al., 2023). The rural EFL learners undertaking online learning should set explicit and attainable objectives for their educational journey, outlining both their desired outcomes and the strategies they intend to employ to reach them. This entails decomposing bigger learning objectives into smaller, feasible activities and devising a study timetable to guarantee consistent advancement (Hertel et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2023). Setting goals enables learners to maintain concentration and drive during their online learning journey.

Effective planning and organizing are essential metacognitive abilities that online EFL learners must possess. Efficient planning is the identification and organization of resources, such as online lectures, readings, and discussion forums, in a manner that facilitates the achievement of learning objectives. It is important for learners to utilize techniques for efficiently managing their time, establishing priorities, and abstaining from procrastinating. Learners enhance their online learning experience and achieve optimal learning outcomes by effectively managing their learning materials and time (Hsu et al., 2023). Meanwhile, monitoring progress is an essential metacognitive ability for online learners. It is important for rural university EFL learners to frequently evaluate their comprehension and advancement in the course by utilizing self-assessment quizzes, progress trackers, or reflective journaling (Broadbent et al., 2021). Through the process of monitoring their progress, learners discern their areas of proficiency and deficiency, enabling them to adapt their study tactics accordingly. It is crucial to obtain feedback from professors, classmates, or online forums in order to evaluate progress and obtain valuable insights into areas that need work.

Reflection is a potent metacognitive technique that improves online learning. It is important for learners to engage in reflection, where they carefully analyze their learning experiences. This involves summarizing important concepts, seeing relationships between ideas, and evaluating how their learning has progressed over a period of time (Wolters et al., 2023). Engaging in reflective practices assist learners in solidifying their comprehension and enhancing their overall learning encounter. Adapting tactics is a crucial metacognitive skill for individuals who learn online. The EFL learners should demonstrate a willingness to modify their study methods in response to feedback and self-evaluation. This may entail experimenting with novel methodologies, pursuing supplementary resources, or modifying their study timetable.

Effective time management is essential for online EFL learners in rural university context to maintain organization, motivation, and progress towards their learning objectives (Henry & Liu, 2024; Luo et al., 2021). An inherent obstacle with online learning is the absence of a well-defined timetable. Contrary to conventional classrooms, which have fixed class periods, online learners are responsible for establishing their own study plan. Efficient time management starts by establishing distinct, attainable objectives for every study session and the entire course. Setting objectives enables learners to maintain concentration and drive, maximizing their study time. Another crucial element of time management in online learning is the act of prioritizing tasks. It is essential for learners to arrange tasks in order of their significance and time limit, giving priority to tasks that are of great value. This guarantees the timely completion of crucial tasks, hence minimizing the tension and worry caused by approaching deadlines. Prioritization additionally assists learners in efficiently allocating their time, guaranteeing that they dedicate sufficient time to each work (Hsu et al., 2023).

An initial crucial aspect of effective help-seeking involves the ability to acknowledge when one requires assistance (Pogorskiy & Beckmann, 2023). It is important for the rural EFL learners to take initiative in checking their comprehension of course material and identifying areas where they need clarification or support. Being conscious of one's own thoughts and emotions is crucial in proactively seeking assistance at an early stage, prior to problems intensifying. After recognizing the need for assistance, learners should investigate the available options. It is advisable for learners to acquaint themselves with these resources and make use of them as necessary (Lan & Huang, 2023).

Efficient communication is crucial when seeking assistance online. When contacting instructors or peers, learners should strive for clarity and conciseness in their communication, including pertinent context and elaborating on their concern or question in a comprehensive manner. This aids in guaranteeing that the recipient comprehends the request and is capable of offering substantial assistance. Engaging in collaborative work with fellow learners is an additional beneficial approach to get assistance in online education (Huang et al., 2023; Martínez-López et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2020). Peer-to-peer support is extremely helpful since

it enables learners to share their experiences, exchange ideas, and collaborate in order to clarify topics. Online discussion forums and group study sessions serve as excellent platforms for fostering collaborative learning. Demonstrating persistence is crucial while seeking assistance through internet platforms. It is important for learners to remain undeterred if they do not obtain a fast response to their inquiries. Instructors or classmates may take a considerable amount of time to respond, particularly in big online classes (Alghamdi et al., 2020; Liu & Wang, 2023). It is advisable for learners to respectfully follow up if they do not obtain a response within a fair period of time.

5. Conclusion

Self-regulated online learning offers a significant chance for EFL learners in rural areas to undergo a transforming experience. These learners overcome the limitations of limited access to traditional educational resources by assuming control of their learning process, establishing goals, measuring their progress, and adjusting their techniques. Online learning platforms provide a means to improve language proficiency and deepen cultural awareness due to its adaptability and ease of access. Nevertheless, it is important for educators and policymakers to provide sufficient assistance and resources to guarantee that learners in remote locations may fully reap the advantages of self-regulated online learning.

Given appropriate assistance, the EFL learners residing in rural areas have the ability to fully realize their capabilities and successfully attain their language acquisition objectives. Moreover, creating a nurturing educational atmosphere that fosters cooperation, offers abundant materials, and encourages introspection is crucial for empowering EFL learners in remote areas to excel in their online learning pursuits. Ultimately, via the utilization of self-regulated online learning, EFL learners residing in rural context fully tap into their capabilities and start on a profound educational experience.

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