VIETNAMESE LAW STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES WITHIN THE READING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (RAC) MODEL

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Abstract

This study investigates Vietnamese law students' perceptions of metacognitive reading strategies embedded within the Reading Across the Curriculum (RAC) model and implemented in an English for Legal Purposes (ELP) course. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach and drawing on the framework of Kim and Anderson (2023), the study collected quantitative data through a questionnaire examining course content, perceived reading support, academic confidence, transferable skills, and overall engagement, alongside qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that students perceived metacognitive reading strategies integrated into RAC activities as particularly useful for supporting their understanding of complex legal texts, increasing academic confidence, and fostering active engagement with course materials. Participants also valued the collaborative aspects of the RAC model, which promoted peer interaction and a sense of learning community. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of explicit instructional guidance and motivational support when implementing metacognitive strategies in discipline-specific EFL contexts. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting students' perceived benefits and limitations of metacognitive strategy instruction within legal education in Viet Nam.

Keywords: Metacognitive strategies; Reading across the curriculum (RAC); Vietnamese law students; English for Legal Purposes (ELP).

1 Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in higher education, particularly for disciplines such as law that demand critical thinking, complex reasoning, and interpretation of dense academic and professional texts (De-la-Peña & Luque-Rojas, 2021). Law students are frequently required to engage with legal statutes, case law, theoretical frameworks, and interdisciplinary materials, often written in technical or abstract language (Candlin et al., 2002; Badger, 2003; Baffy, 2017; Xia, 2020; Poole, 2021). In the Vietnamese context, law students face additional challenges. Many

enter university with limited academic English proficiency, coming from educational backgrounds that emphasise grammar-focused instruction and rote memorisation rather than critical engagement with texts. As a result, they may lack the reading strategies necessary to navigate legal materials in both Vietnamese and English, which impairs not only their academic performance but also their ability to practice law in a globalised environment.

One promising approach to improving reading outcomes in such settings is the use of metacognitive reading strategies (Maasum & Maarof, 2012). These are strategies that require readers to become consciously aware of their reading processes, planning before reading, monitoring during reading, and evaluating comprehension afterward (Ahmadi et al., 2013). Lin (2001) identified a wide range of such strategies, including pre-reading and post-reading journal entries, dialogical and double-entry journaling, "quick writes," and reflective questioning such as "thick and thin" or "thinking cap" questions. These strategies promote active reading, help students make personal connections to texts, and foster deeper comprehension through repeated interaction with meaning-making processes. Empirical evidence supports the view that explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies can enhance both self-regulation and reading comprehension (Carrell, Pharis & Liberto, 1989; Nash-Ditzel, 2010).

Moreover, a growing body of research emphasises the importance of situating reading instruction within authentic disciplinary contexts. This is the premise of the Reading Across the Curriculum (RAC) model, which aims to integrate reading into all subject areas, not just language courses, by embedding discipline-specific reading strategies into content instruction (Anderson & Kim, 2011). Designed to support underprepared students at Fayetteville State University, the RAC model has demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing academic literacy across various disciplines (Anderson & Kim, 2011). Key components of the model include training faculty to revise their syllabi to include reading objectives, promoting active reading strategies in content courses, and encouraging interdisciplinary reading assignments that build background knowledge while reinforcing subject matter comprehension (Anderson & Kim, 2011).

Although both metacognitive strategy instruction and the RAC model have proven beneficial in separate domains, relatively few studies have examined how they can be combined, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environments like Viet Nam. The current Vietnamese university system remains highly exam-oriented, with limited space for strategy-based reading instruction in non-language courses such as law. Consequently, law students often struggle with both surface-level comprehension and deeper interpretive skills, especially when reading in English. As Maasum and Maarof (2012) and Pammu et al. (2014) observed, many EFL university students do not fully utilise metacognitive strategies, often relying on bottom-up decoding skills rather than top-down comprehension monitoring. This is compounded by a lack of faculty training in how to scaffold reading in content-heavy classes.

Cultural and educational factors may also shape how students perceive reading strategies. Studies by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Taki (2016) suggest that non-native English speakers value support strategies more than native speakers, reflecting differences in instructional histories and access to academic resources. In many Asian contexts, students are less familiar with reflective and student-centred pedagogies. Therefore, metacognitive strategy instruction must be tailored to cultural expectations and student readiness. Implementing such strategies through a structured model like RAC may provide the scaffolding needed to bridge this gap.

This research addresses a notable gap in the literature. While many studies have investigated metacognitive reading strategy use among EFL learners in general (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025; Aghaie & Zhang, 2012), little attention has been paid to the context of law education in Viet Nam (La, 2022; Nhac & Nguyen, 2024). Even fewer have explored the combination of metacognitive strategy instruction with the RAC model in a Vietnamese setting. Law, as a discipline, presents a unique context where precise reading, inferential reasoning, and contextual interpretation are not just academic goals but professional imperatives. Legal texts often include complex sentence structures, implicit reasoning, and culturally specific legal norms. For Vietnamese law students to succeed both academically and professionally, they can learn to read not just for literal meaning, but for legal nuance and rhetorical intent.

The aim of this study is to examine Vietnamese law students' perceptions and experiences of using metacognitive reading strategies within the context of the RAC model. Rather than measuring reading development or proficiency gains, the study focuses on how students engage with these strategies, how useful they perceive them to be in disciplinary legal reading, and the conditions that influence their uptake. Specifically, it explores students' perceptions of metacognitive strategy use and the dominant factors shaping those perceptions, including prior educational experience, language proficiency, classroom environment, and instructor support. By foregrounding learner experience and strategy engagement, the study offers insights into students' receptiveness to metacognitive instruction and the pedagogical conditions under which such approaches are most likely to be meaningful and sustainable. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are Vietnamese law students' perceptions of the usefulness of metacognitive reading strategies embedded within the Reading Across the Curriculum model?
2. What factors influence Vietnamese law students' perceptions of and engagement with metacognitive reading strategies within the Reading Across the Curriculum model?

2 Literature Review

2.1 The importance of reading comprehension in legal education

Reading comprehension plays a central role in academic and professional success, particularly in disciplines like law that require the interpretation of dense, abstract, and culturally embedded texts. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in legal education, such as those in Viet Nam, reading proficiency in both the first (L1) and second language (L2) is essential for understanding complex legal concepts. Yet, many students lack the strategic reading skills necessary to process academic texts critically and independently. This is particularly relevant in foreign language contexts, where reading competence depends on the interaction of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and prior experience (Horníčková & Stranovská, 2022).

Two complementary pedagogical approaches have gained prominence in this context: metacognitive reading strategies and the Reading Across the Curriculum (RAC) model. This review synthesises literature on both, focusing on their potential integration to improve Vietnamese law students' reading comprehension.

2.2 Metacognitive reading strategies: Definitions and effects

Metacognitive reading strategies refer to learners' conscious control over planning, monitoring, and evaluating their reading processes (Ahmadi, Ismail & Abdullah, 2013). Lin (2001) outlines a variety of techniques—such as reflective journals, quick writes, and questioning strategies—that support deeper engagement with text and build readers' autonomy and comprehension.

A strong body of empirical research demonstrates that teaching metacognitive strategies improves reading outcomes. For instance, Nash-Ditzel (2010) showed that college students trained in self-regulation changed their reading behaviours and comprehension outcomes. Similarly, Aghaie and Zhang (2012) found significant improvements in Iranian EFL learners' reading performance through explicit strategy instruction. These benefits are especially pronounced in non-native contexts where students face both language and content-related barriers.

Patterns across studies reveal that problem-solving strategies are the most commonly used and perceived as effective (Villanueva, 2022; Pammu et al., 2014), while global and support strategies are often underused by less proficient readers. This suggests that learners may require balanced, targeted instruction to develop a fuller repertoire of strategies. In addition, students' perceptions of these strategies matter: Teng (2020) and Taki (2016) highlight that when students value a strategy, they are more likely to adopt it consistently.

However, research also shows disparities in strategy use based on reading ability and cultural background. For example, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) observed that high-ability readers—regardless of L1—use metacognitive strategies

more frequently. Meanwhile, Yüksel and Yüksel (2012) found that Turkish EFL students used problem-solving strategies most often, but were less aware of support strategies. These findings suggest that both strategy awareness and contextual factors (e.g., language background, academic culture) shape student behaviour.

2.3 Reading across the curriculum (RAC): Integrating strategy and discipline

The RAC model, initially developed to combat "aliteracy" in U.S. colleges, promotes reading as an institution-wide responsibility, integrated across disciplines (Anderson & Kim, 2011). It aims to increase reading volume and depth by embedding reading strategies into content instruction. Rather than treating reading as a skill exclusive to language courses, RAC encourages collaboration between content-area faculty and language educators to support students' literacy development within their academic fields.

Anderson and Kim (2011) demonstrated that students participating in a RAC faculty revision project significantly improved their reading comprehension and course performance. Importantly, the model also promoted faculty awareness of students' reading challenges and fostered innovation in curriculum design.

Although RAC originated in a Western educational setting, its principles are highly relevant to EFL contexts. Embedding purposeful, contextualised reading tasks into content instruction—especially in legal studies—can help students bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and content mastery. Yet, in Viet Nam and other Asian contexts, reading often remains passive, assessed through standardised testing rather than reflective or analytical engagement (Zhussupova & Kazbekova, 2016).

2.4 Synthesising metacognitive strategy use in EFL and legal education

Research consistently affirms the value of metacognitive strategy instruction for EFL learners across disciplines, particularly when viewed through the lens of self-regulated learning. Early work by Carrell et al. (1989) demonstrated that explicit metacognitive training supports learners in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their reading in relation to academic goals. More recently, Khellab et al. (2022), using the CALLA model, showed that metacognitive strategy instruction can lead to measurable gains in reading comprehension in an engineering context. However, beyond performance outcomes, such studies also highlight the role of learner agency and strategic awareness in shaping how students engage with academic texts.

Importantly, studies by Ghimire and Mokhtari (2025) and Villanueva (2022) suggest that strategies such as summarising, evaluating credibility, and monitoring comprehension are associated with academic reading success across international contexts. From a disciplinary literacy perspective, these strategies are particularly salient in law, where students are expected not only to comprehend texts but to interpret arguments, analyse evidence, and engage with implicit reasoning. Despite this, limited research has examined how law students in EFL contexts perceive these

strategies, how they integrate them into disciplinary reading practices, or how their beliefs about reading influence strategy uptake.

Learner beliefs and educational experiences also shape engagement with metacognitive strategies. In Viet Nam, many students come from exam-oriented educational systems where reading prioritises speed and accuracy over reflection and critical interpretation. As a result, students may have limited exposure to metacognitive approaches or may perceive such strategies as peripheral rather than integral to disciplinary learning. From a self-regulated learning standpoint, this suggests that students' perceptions of usefulness and relevance play a crucial role in whether strategies are meaningfully adopted.

While international studies have highlighted the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies and the RAC model, few have explored their application in Vietnamese legal education—an area characterised by both linguistic and disciplinary complexity. In particular, there is limited research on how Vietnamese law students perceive metacognitive reading strategies or how the RAC model supports strategy uptake, engagement, and learner experience in disciplinary reading contexts. This study addresses this gap by investigating (1) Vietnamese law students' perceptions of metacognitive strategies and (2) the factors influencing these perceptions within a Reading Across the Curriculum framework. In doing so, it positions metacognitive strategy use not only as an instructional tool, but as a component of students' self-regulated engagement with legal texts in an EFL context.

3 Methodology

This study aimed to investigate Vietnamese law students' perceptions of metacognitive reading strategies and the underlying factors influencing their engagement with these strategies through the RAC model. To achieve these objectives, the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research was structured in two phases: a quantitative phase involving the distribution of a structured questionnaire to collect broad data on students' perceptions, followed by a qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews to provide depth and context to the quantitative findings. This design allowed for both the measurement of general trends and the exploration of students' personal experiences, attitudes, and challenges in applying metacognitive strategies within academic legal reading.

3.1 Research design

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design began with the administration of a questionnaire adapted from Kim and Anderson (2023), which focused on metacognitive strategies related to reading comprehension in legal contexts. After analysing the survey results, a subset of participants was invited to participate in

interviews to explore their responses more deeply. This combination of quantitative breadth and qualitative depth enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.2 Research participants

A total of 320 undergraduate law students participated in the questionnaire phase. These students were either in their second or third year of study and had been exposed to reading-intensive legal English or bilingual courses as part of the university curriculum. All participants had experience with academic texts in both English and Vietnamese, making them suitable for this investigation.

From the survey participants, 15 students were purposively selected for the interview phase using a maximum variation sampling strategy. This subgroup was chosen to reflect diversity in terms of academic performance, English language proficiency, and familiarity with metacognitive strategies. The selected students provided rich insights into the motivations, obstacles, and individual strategies they employed in legal reading tasks.

3.3 Research instruments

The study employed two main data collection instruments: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. The questionnaire was based on Kim and Anderson's (2023) framework for assessing students' perceptions of metacognitive strategy use. In line with the perception-based design of the study, the instrument was intended to examine learners' experiences, perceived usefulness, and engagement with metacognitive reading strategies, rather than to measure objective changes in reading performance. It included 13 Likert-scale items grouped into five thematic categories: *Course content, Transferable skills and abilities, Reading comprehension skills, Academic confidence*, and *Overall learning experience and engagement*. Each item was rated on a five-point scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), allowing for the systematic examination of students' attitudes toward the application and perceived value of metacognitive strategies in their legal studies.

The first thematic dimension, *Course content alignment*, explored the perceived integration of metacognitive strategies into law-specific reading materials. The second, *Transferable skills and abilities*, assessed how students perceived the applicability of these strategies in broader academic and professional contexts. The third dimension, *Reading comprehension skills*, focused on students' self-reported perceptions of their ability to extract, organise, and retain information from complex legal texts when using metacognitive strategies. The fourth, *Academic confidence*, evaluated students' beliefs about their academic capabilities as influenced by strategy use. Finally, the fifth dimension, *Overall learning experience and engagement*, addressed affective, motivational, and engagement-related aspects of learning within the RAC framework.

To complement the survey data, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed. The interviews were designed to elicit in-depth accounts of students' reading experiences, their familiarity with and use of metacognitive strategies, and their perceptions of how these strategies shaped their engagement and learning processes. Interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes and were conducted in either English or Vietnamese, based on participants' preference. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

4 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over an eight-week period during the spring semester of the academic year. The survey was distributed electronically via Google Forms and also administered in-class for students without regular internet access. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The response rate was high, with 120 students completing the survey in full.

After analysing the initial survey results, the researchers identified a group of 15 students representing a range of responses across the five thematic categories. These students were contacted for follow-up interviews, which were conducted in quiet, private spaces on campus. The interviews were scheduled at the students' convenience and recorded digitally for subsequent transcription and coding. Students were informed that participation in the study would not affect their grades or academic standing.

4.1 Data analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated to determine overall trends across the five thematic dimensions. To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha values were computed for each theme, with all dimensions showing acceptable internal consistency.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). After transcription, two researchers independently coded the interviews to identify recurring patterns related to the five core themes of the study. Codes were then grouped into broader categories, and overarching themes were developed to represent the main narratives shared by the participants. Discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion, and a third researcher reviewed the themes to ensure credibility.

Finally, both data sets were integrated during the interpretation phase. Quantitative findings provided generalisable insights into students' perceptions, while qualitative data illustrated individual experiences and revealed contextual factors shaping those perceptions. This triangulated analysis approach allowed for a

comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies within the RAC framework for Vietnamese law students.

5 Results

This study sought to explore Vietnamese law students' perceptions of the metacognitive reading strategies embedded in the RAC model, focusing on five core areas: Course content, Transfer skills/abilities, Reading comprehension skills, Academic confidence, and Overall learning experience/engagement. The following section presents a detailed analysis of the quantitative data collected through a questionnaire adapted from Kim and Anderson (2023), reflecting students' responses to various statements within each thematic category.

5.1 Course content

Students' perceptions of the RAC model's effectiveness in facilitating their understanding of course content were varied. The statement, "The three reading assignments helped me understand the course content," elicited a notably low mean response of 2.35 (SD = 0.98), suggesting that many students did not strongly agree that the reading assignments alone sufficiently supported their grasp of the subject matter. This result indicates a potential disconnect between the assignments' design and students' expectations or learning preferences. It is possible that some students found the assignments challenging or perhaps insufficiently aligned with their needs to fully comprehend complex legal content. S1 shared:

> *The reading assignments were hard for me. They had a lot of difficult words and were long, so just reading them didn't help me understand the course well. I needed more explanations or examples to make sense of the readings. It felt like I had to figure everything out by myself, and that was sometimes too much.* (S1)

Conversely, the item "I understood the course content better through the reading comprehension activities" received a high mean score of 4.61 (SD = 0.92), indicating that when the reading activities incorporated metacognitive strategies—such as summarising, questioning, or predicting—students felt a significant improvement in their understanding of the material. This contrast suggests that while the assignments themselves may have been perceived as less effective, the active engagement with reading comprehension techniques embedded within these tasks was beneficial for learning. S11 pointed out:

> *The reading activities where we had to summarize or ask questions really helped me understand the material better. Doing these tasks made me think more about what I was reading instead of just trying to remember everything. It was easier to follow the course content when I used these strategies.* (S11)

Moreover, students recognised the breadth and richness of the course material, as reflected in the mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.99) for "I was introduced to a rich diversity of the issues in the course." This appreciation for diverse content may have contributed positively to their overall learning experience, allowing them to engage with multiple perspectives and legal contexts, which is essential in law education. The recognition of content diversity also suggests that the RAC model successfully incorporated a wide range of relevant topics, potentially enhancing student motivation and intellectual curiosity. S9 stated:

> *I liked that the course covered a lot of different topics and ideas. It wasn't just the same thing over and over. Learning about many different issues made the class more interesting and helped me see things from different points of view, which is really important for studying law.* (S9)

5.2 Transfer skills/abilities

Regarding the applicability of the reading strategies beyond the immediate course context, the mean response to "The reading strategies introduced in this class were easily transferable to other courses" was moderate at 3.59 (SD = 0.93). This reflects a somewhat positive perception of transferability, though not overwhelmingly so. Students may have found the metacognitive reading techniques somewhat useful across disciplines but perhaps encountered challenges when attempting to adapt them to different subject matters or academic demands. S7 highlighted:

> *Some of the reading strategies we learned were helpful for other classes too, but not all of them fit easily. Sometimes it was hard to use the same methods because other subjects had different types of readings or assignments.* (S7)

The moderate endorsement could also reflect varying levels of students' confidence or familiarity with using these strategies independently in other settings. It is worth considering that transfer of learning is often complex and influenced by multiple factors, including students' prior knowledge, the nature of other courses, and the explicit teaching of how to apply such strategies in varied contexts. These findings align with literature emphasising the need for intentional scaffolding to support transferability, suggesting that future iterations of the RAC model might benefit from integrating more explicit guidance on applying metacognitive skills across the curriculum. S2 emphasised:

> *I think some students felt unsure about using these reading strategies in other classes because they weren't really taught how to do that. It's one thing to learn the strategy here, but it's harder to know how to use it somewhere else without extra help.* (S2)

5.3 Reading comprehension skills

Students' perceptions of the impact of metacognitive strategies on reading comprehension reveal a clear distinction between task-level support and perceived long-term reading development. At the task level, students responded very positively to the statement "The reading comprehension strategies that were used in this class made me understand the reading selections more easily" (M = 4.26, SD = 0.93), indicating that they perceived these strategies as highly effective in supporting immediate engagement with assigned legal texts. This finding reflects students' recognition of metacognitive strategies as useful scaffolds for navigating complex readings within specific learning tasks, rather than as indicators of generalised skill improvement. S8 shared:

> *The reading strategies really helped me get what the texts were about. When I used things like summarising or asking questions while reading, it was easier to understand what I was reading.* (S8)

In contrast, students expressed markedly lower agreement with the statement "I improved my reading comprehension skills because of the RAC project throughout the semester" (M = 1.99, SD = 0.90), suggesting scepticism regarding sustained or transferable reading development. This divergence highlights an important analytic finding: students differentiated clearly between the immediate usefulness of metacognitive strategies during specific reading tasks and their perceptions of broader, long-term improvement in reading ability. S4 pointed out:

> *I think the strategies helped me understand the readings for the class, but I'm not sure if I really got better at reading overall. It felt like it worked only when I was doing the assignments, but I didn't notice much improvement outside of that.* (S4)

This contrast between strong perceived task-level support and weak perceived long-term skill development offers valuable insight into how students conceptualise learning progress. Rather than viewing strategy use as evidence of cumulative reading growth, students appeared to frame metacognitive strategies as situational tools that facilitate comprehension within structured instructional contexts. Several factors may account for this perception, including the limited duration of the intervention, the absence of explicit guidance on recognising gradual skill development, and students' high self-expectations regarding reading proficiency. Importantly, these findings do not suggest that learning did not occur, but rather that students may require sustained exposure and explicit reflection to perceive metacognitive strategy use as contributing to long-term reading development. This distinction underscores the importance of longitudinal reinforcement and reflective scaffolding when implementing metacognitive strategies in disciplines such as law, where reading demands are both complex and cumulative.

5.4 Academic confidence

In contrast to the mixed views on reading skill improvement, students reported significant gains in academic confidence associated with the RAC activities. The statement "I gained academic confidence in the course because of the RAC project and assignments" garnered a high mean score of 4.50 (SD = 0.91), reflecting a robust sense of self-efficacy linked to participation in metacognitive reading tasks. S7 shared:

> *Doing the RAC assignments really made me feel more confident in my studies. Even if the reading was tough, using the strategies helped me believe I could handle the material and do well in the course.* (S7)

This finding aligns with educational research indicating that successful engagement with challenging academic work can enhance students' confidence, which in turn can motivate further learning and persistence. The RAC model's structured support, combined with opportunities for reflection and dialogue, likely contributed to this positive outcome. Increased confidence is especially valuable in legal education, where students must navigate complex materials and rigorous assessment environments. The confidence boost may also help explain students' willingness to engage with diverse content and to participate in discussions, as reported in other areas of the survey.

5.5 Overall learning experience/engagement

Students' overall engagement and satisfaction with the course showed a more varied pattern. The general statement "My overall learning experiences in the course were positive" received a moderate mean score of 3.27 (SD = 0.90), indicating a somewhat neutral to positive stance toward their experience. This suggests that while students found value in the course, there were also reservations or areas for improvement. S9 pointed out:

> *Overall, I think the course was okay. Some parts were interesting and helpful, but other parts didn't really connect with me or felt hard to stay engaged with.* (S9)

Interest in the reading materials was similarly moderate, with a mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.96) for the statement "I found the reading in this course interesting." While this shows a degree of engagement, it also suggests room for enhancing the relevance or appeal of reading selections to better capture students' curiosity and motivation. S13 stated:

> *Some of the readings were pretty interesting, but others didn't catch my attention as much. I think if the topics were more relatable or connected to real-life examples, I'd be more motivated to read.* (S13)

One of the strongest positive outcomes was the sense of community among students, as evidenced by the very high mean score of 4.89 (SD = 0.97) for "I felt a sense of community and common ground with other students." This indicates that the RAC model's collaborative elements successfully fostered peer connection, which is critical for supportive learning environments and can enhance academic engagement and persistence. S14 highlighted:

> *I really liked how we could share ideas and talk with other students. It made me feel like I wasn't alone in the class, and that helped me stay motivated and understand the material better.* (S14)

Similarly, students affirmed opportunities for informal interaction with their instructor (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.97), suggesting that the course structure supported accessible and personalised communication, further contributing to a positive learning atmosphere. S5 shared:

> *The teacher was easy to talk to outside of class. I felt comfortable asking questions anytime, which helped me understand things better and feel supported.* (S5)

Despite these strengths, motivation to pursue further learning beyond the classroom was relatively low, with the statement "I was inspired to learn more about the course topic through the RAC project" scoring a mean of only 2.11 (SD = 0.95). This highlights a potential challenge in translating classroom engagement into sustained intellectual curiosity or independent inquiry, which may require additional instructional strategies focused on fostering intrinsic motivation. S10 emphasised:

> *I think the project helped me understand the course better, but it didn't really make me want to explore more on my own. Sometimes I felt like I was just doing the work to finish it, not because I was excited to learn more.* (S10)

Finally, students reported frequent out-of-class conversations about course topics, with a mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.91). This suggests that the RAC activities successfully encouraged peer discussion and social learning, extending engagement beyond formal settings and possibly reinforcing comprehension and critical thinking. S15 mentioned:

> *I often talked with my classmates outside of class about the course topics. These conversations helped me understand different viewpoints and made the learning feel more real.* (S15)

6 Discussion

This study investigated students' perceptions of the RAC model in facilitating understanding, skill development, confidence, and engagement in a law-related course. The findings reveal a complex but insightful picture regarding the

effectiveness and limitations of metacognitive reading strategies embedded in the RAC framework.

6.1 Course content

The findings reveal a nuanced student perception regarding the effectiveness of the RAC model in supporting their understanding of course content. While students reported low agreement with the statement that reading assignments alone helped them grasp the material, they responded positively to the reading comprehension activities that embedded metacognitive strategies. This suggests that simply assigning readings without active engagement is insufficient, especially given the complexity of legal texts, which often feature specialised vocabulary and intricate argumentation. These results align with Lin's (2001) argument that metacognitive strategies such as summarising and questioning scaffold deeper engagement with texts. Similarly, the students' appreciation of the diversity of course topics indicates that the RAC model's incorporation of rich content can stimulate intellectual curiosity, a crucial factor for motivation in higher education (Anderson & Kim, 2011). However, the gap between the perceived utility of raw reading materials and strategy-infused activities underscores the importance of integrating metacognitive supports rather than relying on exposure alone, particularly for EFL learners in demanding disciplines like law.

6.2 Transfer skills and abilities

Students expressed moderate confidence in their ability to transfer reading strategies learned through the RAC project to other courses, highlighting the challenges of generalising metacognitive skills across different academic contexts. This finding echoes Teng's (2020) assertion that perceptions significantly influence strategy use; without explicit scaffolding on transfer, students may hesitate to apply skills outside the immediate course. Moreover, the diverse demands of various disciplines mean that strategies effective in legal studies may require adaptation to fit other subject matter, supporting Carrell et al.'s (1989) emphasis on contextualised strategy instruction. The moderate transferability observed suggests a need for the RAC model to include more deliberate guidance on applying metacognitive approaches broadly, ensuring students gain confidence in autonomous use of reading strategies beyond the law curriculum. Addressing this in curriculum design could bridge the gap between isolated skill practice and integrated academic literacy.

6.3 Reading comprehension skills

The data highlight a positive immediate impact of metacognitive strategies on students' engagement with reading selections, consistent with prior research showing that active strategy use enhances comprehension (Maasum & Maarof, 2012; Aghaie & Zhang, 2012). However, the marked scepticism regarding lasting

improvement in overall reading skills suggests that short-term strategy application during assignments does not necessarily translate into durable reading proficiency gains. This finding aligns with Pammu et al.'s (2014) observation that learners may use some strategies effectively in specific contexts but lack broader metacognitive awareness for general skill development. Additionally, the short duration of the study and students' high self-expectations could have influenced this perception. These insights emphasise the importance of sustained and repeated metacognitive training embedded throughout legal education to foster enduring competence. Longitudinal studies may be needed to track how reading skills evolve with continued RAC implementation, particularly in rigorous academic fields where comprehension demands are high.

6.4 Academic confidence

Contrasting with the mixed views on skill acquisition, students reported significant gains in academic confidence linked to their engagement with the RAC activities. This is a valuable outcome, as increased self-efficacy can enhance motivation and persistence in challenging academic environments (Taki, 2016). The structured use of metacognitive reading strategies may have empowered students by making difficult legal texts more approachable and providing clear tools to manage their learning. This confidence boost aligns with Villanueva's (2022) findings on the relationship between metacognitive strategy use and academic self-belief. In legal education, where students frequently encounter dense and abstract material, fostering confidence is critical for maintaining engagement and encouraging risk-taking in learning. Thus, even if immediate skill improvements were modest, the RAC model's positive effect on students' belief in their academic capabilities represents a meaningful step toward better learning outcomes.

6.5 Overall learning experience and engagement

Students' overall engagement with the RAC course was moderate, indicating both strengths and areas needing enhancement. The high sense of community and peer interaction reflects one of the model's successes, as collaborative learning environments have been shown to support comprehension and motivation (Anderson & Kim, 2011). Likewise, the accessibility of instructors contributed to a positive learning atmosphere, reinforcing the value of supportive teacher-student relationships (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). However, students' limited intrinsic motivation to pursue further learning beyond the classroom signals a challenge in cultivating deeper intellectual curiosity. This resonates with prior critiques of Asian academic contexts where reading is often a task-driven activity rather than an exploratory process (Taki, 2016). To enhance sustained engagement, future implementations of the RAC model might incorporate strategies specifically aimed at fostering intrinsic motivation, such as connecting readings more explicitly to real-world legal issues or incorporating reflective activities that encourage personal

investment. Furthermore, the moderate interest in some reading materials suggests that selecting texts with greater relevance or cultural resonance could improve student engagement.

A key contribution of this study lies in its contextual focus on Vietnamese law students, a group and discipline underrepresented in existing research on metacognitive reading strategies and the RAC model. While prior studies have established the general effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction in diverse EFL contexts (e.g., Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Villanueva, 2022) and the benefits of RAC in embedding reading within academic content (Anderson & Kim, 2011), this study uniquely highlights the nuanced perceptions of legal students navigating complex bilingual texts in a highly specialised field. Notably, the findings reveal a disconnect between students' appreciation of active, strategy-based reading activities and their scepticism toward lasting improvements in overall reading skills—a contrast less emphasised in earlier research. Moreover, the significant boost in academic confidence, despite mixed views on skill acquisition, suggests that metacognitive strategies may first serve to empower learners psychologically before translating into measurable skill gains. This psychological dimension, alongside the moderate transferability of strategies to other courses, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in applying metacognitive approaches within Viet Nam's exam-oriented and discipline-specific educational environment. Thus, this study complements and extends the literature by offering both empirical insights and practical implications tailored to legal education in a non-Western EFL context.

7 Conclusion

This study examined students' perceptions of the RAC model implemented in a law-related course, focusing on its impact on understanding course content, reading skills, academic confidence, and overall engagement. Key findings revealed that while the reading assignments alone were not seen as highly effective, the incorporation of metacognitive reading strategies significantly improved students' immediate comprehension and confidence. Students appreciated the diverse course content and the sense of community fostered by the RAC activities, which encouraged collaboration and informal discussions. However, students were less convinced about the long-term improvement of their reading skills and the transferability of strategies to other courses. Additionally, motivation to pursue independent learning beyond the classroom remained relatively low.

The implications of these findings highlight the value of the RAC model in shaping students' perceptions of disciplinary reading, increasing their awareness of metacognitive strategies, and fostering engagement through structured support and peer interaction. Rather than demonstrating direct reading skill development, the study shows how students perceive metacognitive strategies as useful tools for navigating complex legal texts and for building academic confidence within a

supportive learning environment. Accordingly, educators are encouraged to integrate metacognitive strategies explicitly into course design and to provide guidance that helps students recognise the relevance and applicability of these strategies across disciplinary contexts. In addition, enhancing the relevance of reading materials and incorporating approaches that promote intrinsic motivation may further strengthen students' engagement and willingness to adopt strategic reading practices. Overall, the study underscores the importance of ongoing scaffolding and reinforcement in supporting students' perceived confidence, metacognitive awareness, and engagement with complex, discipline-specific legal texts.

Despite these valuable insights, the study has limitations that warrant consideration. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases related to students' self-awareness and confidence levels. The relatively short duration of the study limits the ability to assess long-term skill development and transfer. Future research should explore longitudinal designs to track reading skill growth over time and examine how different instructional strategies impact motivation and transferability more deeply. Additionally, expanding the sample to include diverse disciplines and institutional contexts would enhance the generalisability of findings and inform broader applications of the RAC model.

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