

MASTERING AUTONOMY: THE POWER OF SELF-REGULATED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *In the dynamic landscape of higher education, self-regulated learning (SRL) emerges as a cornerstone for academic success and lifelong learning. This article examines the essential components of SRL, discussing the metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions that inform this holistic learning approach. By highlighting the critical importance of SRL, we shed light on its role in promoting deeper comprehension, fostering resilience in the face of academic challenges, and preparing students for the ever-evolving demands of the modern workforce. Furthermore, the article offers actionable strategies for educators and institutions to foster SRL among students. These encompass curricular interventions, technology-driven tools, feedback mechanisms, and creating a conducive learning environment. By embedding these strategies into the educational framework, higher education institutions can cultivate autonomous learners equipped with the skills to navigate the complex world of tomorrow.*

Keywords: self-regulated learning, autonomy, strategies, higher education

1. Introduction

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to the process whereby learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of learning goals [1]. This process involves the self-awareness, self-motivation, and behavioral skills to implement that knowledge appropriately in different learning situations.

In higher education, the significance of self-regulated learning acquires considerable importance. As students transition from structured school environments to the more independent and demanding realm of higher education, the ability to autonomously direct their own learning becomes pivotal. Higher education institutions often provide a breadth of knowledge and diverse courses, requiring students to manage multiple complex tasks, set academic goals,

and maintain consistent motivation amidst distractions. Self-regulated learning equips students with the skills to efficiently plan, monitor, and evaluate their own understanding and performance [2]. By mastering self-regulation, students are better positioned to adapt to new challenges, make informed decisions about their study approaches, and foster lifelong learning habits. In essence, self-regulated learning is not only a tool for academic success in higher education but also a foundation for continuous personal and professional growth throughout life.

2. Key Components of Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning is a multifaceted process that involves a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and

behavioral components [3]. The key components of self-regulated learning include:

- ✓ *Cognitive Strategies*. These are the tactics learners use to help process and understand the material, such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organization strategies. Elaboration involves making connections between new information and what one already knows, while rehearsal entails repetitively practicing the material. Organizational strategies, such as summarizing or creating concept maps, aid in structuring information in a coherent manner.

- ✓ *Metacognition*. This encompasses a learner's ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognitive processes. These mechanisms involve awareness of one's own thinking and learning strategies and understanding when and how to use them. For example, before studying, a self-regulated learner might ask, "What do I already know about this topic?" During studying, they might monitor their comprehension by asking, "Do I understand what I just read?" After studying, they might evaluate their performance by asking, "What can I do better next time?"

- ✓ *Motivational Regulation*. This parameter refers to controlling and directing one's own motivation and emotions related to learning. Self-regulated set specific goals, are confident in their abilities, and maintain a positive attitude toward learning.

- ✓ *Behavioral Regulation*. This involves controlling one's behavior to ensure learning goals are met. Aspects include effective time management, recognizing when assistance is needed and seeking it and persisting through challenges and not giving up easily.

- ✓ *Regulation of the Learning Environment*. This pertains to how learners can manipulate their surroundings to optimize learning. This can involve finding the right physical space to study, ensuring they have all necessary materials, or collaborating with peers. Some learners benefit from interacting with peers, seeking feedback, or

working in groups, and they need to know when and how to leverage social interactions for their learning benefit [4].

Self-regulated learning is a cyclical process. Learners set goals, develop strategies to reach those goals, monitor their progress, and adjust their strategies if they are not making satisfactory progress. Over time, as learners become more skilled in self-regulation, they become more autonomous and effective learners. Each key component plays a crucial role in enabling students to take charge of their own learning process, adapt to various learning situations, and ultimately succeed in their academic endeavors.

3. The Importance of Self-Regulated Learning in Higher Education

Higher education represents a critical transition period in an individual's academic journey. Unlike the more structured environments of earlier educational levels, higher education demands a higher degree of independence and self-direction from its students. In this context, self-regulated learning emerges as a cornerstone for academic success and personal development [5]. The next section will discuss the significance of self-regulated learning in higher education, emphasizing its role in fostering academic achievement, promoting lifelong learning, and preparing students for future professional challenges.

At its core, self-regulated learning refers to the process by which students take charge of their own learning experiences. It encompasses a myriad of skills including planning, goal-setting, monitoring one's progress, and adjusting strategies based on feedback [6]. In the vast and often daunting landscape of higher education, where students are presented with a plethora of courses, expansive content, and diverse assessment methods, the ability to self-regulate becomes invaluable. It empowers students to navigate this landscape efficiently, making informed decisions

about their study techniques, managing their time effectively, and constantly reflecting on their performance to ensure continuous improvement.

Higher education is not just about absorbing information; the successful academic journey hinges on cultivating a mindset of inquiry, critical thinking, and adaptability. Self-regulated learning aligns seamlessly with these objectives. By fostering metacognition – the ability to think about one’s own thinking – self-regulated learning encourages students to be critical of the information they encounter, to seek deeper understanding, and to connect new knowledge with prior experiences [7]. In doing so, students are not just passive recipients of knowledge but active constructors of their own understanding.

Furthermore, the importance of self-regulated learning extends beyond academic success in higher education. As students graduate and transition into the professional world, they encounter environments where continuous learning and adaptation are essential. The professional landscape is dynamic, with evolving technologies, shifting paradigms, and emerging challenges. In such a scenario, the ability to self-regulate one’s learning becomes a lifelong asset. It equips individuals with the skills to identify gaps in their knowledge, seek resources to bridge these gaps, and remain relevant and competitive in their respective fields.

In addition, the skills inherent to self-regulated learning, such as goal setting, time management, and self-reflection, have broader applicability in various facets of life. They foster personal growth, enhance problem-solving abilities, and promote resilience in the face of challenges [8].

Overall, the role of self-regulated learning in higher education is paramount. It not only serves as a compass guiding students through their academic pursuits but also lays the foundation for lifelong learning and personal and professional development. As

the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, with greater emphasis on online learning, diverse course structures, and interdisciplinary studies, the ability to self-regulate one’s learning journey will remain a crucial determinant of success. Institutions, educators, and students alike must recognize and nurture this skill, ensuring that learners are not just prepared for exams but for the broader challenges of life.

4. Strategies to Foster Self-Regulated Learning in Higher Education

The voyage through higher education is one marked by increased independence, diverse challenges, and the need for adaptability. Against this background, SRL stands out as a pivotal skill, enabling students to take charge of their learning experiences. However, cultivating SRL does not occur spontaneously; it requires deliberate effort, both from institutions and learners. The following will enumerate some strategies that can be employed to foster self-regulated learning in higher education, ultimately paving the way for academic success and lifelong learning.

1. Offer Explicit Instruction on SRL Techniques:

While many students may be aware of the concept of self-regulation, they might not be familiar with specific strategies or understand how to apply them. Incorporating workshops or courses that explicitly teach techniques like goal setting, time management, and metacognitive strategies can provide students with a toolkit to approach their studies more effectively.

2. Promote Reflective Practices:

Encouraging students to regularly reflect on their learning process is crucial. This could involve maintaining learning journals, engaging in peer discussions, or undertaking self-assessment tasks. Through reflection, students can identify their strengths, recognize areas for improvement, and modify their strategies accordingly.

3. Facilitate Peer Interaction and Collaboration:

Peer interactions can serve as a mirror, reflecting different aspects of one's learning process. Group tasks, discussion forums, and peer assessment can allow students to gauge their understanding in relation to others, gain new perspectives, and learn collaboratively [9].

4. Incorporate Technology and Digital Tools:

With the proliferation of digital tools designed to enhance learning, institutions can leverage platforms that support SRL. Tools that allow for progress tracking, personalized feedback, and adaptive learning can enable students to monitor and regulate their learning trajectories more effectively.

5. Provide Constructive Feedback:

Timely and constructive feedback can act as a compass, guiding students towards the right direction. Instead of merely pointing out mistakes, feedback should offer insights into how a student can improve, thus encouraging them to take corrective actions and fostering a growth mindset.

6. Encourage Autonomy in Learning:

Empower students to take charge of their learning by offering choices. This could be in the form of elective courses, project topics, or research directions. When students have a say in their learning journey, they are more likely to engage deeply and take responsibility for their outcomes.

7. Promote a Growth Mindset:

Fostering an environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth rather than failures can significantly influence students' approach to learning. By promoting a growth mindset, institutions can encourage resilience, perseverance, and a continuous quest for improvement – key tenets of SRL.

8. Provide Real-life Application Scenarios: Helping students connect theoretical knowledge to real-world applications can boost intrinsic motivation, a key component of SRL. This could be achieved through

case studies, internships, or problem-based learning, where students tackle real-world challenges using their knowledge [10].

In summary, fostering self-regulated learning in higher education requires a multifaceted approach, combining explicit instruction, feedback mechanisms, technological tools, and a conducive learning environment. As institutions endeavor to prepare students for not just academic achievements but also real-world challenges, placing SRL at the core of their pedagogical strategies is imperative. Not only does it empower students during their time in higher education, but it also equips them with skills that remain valuable throughout their professional and personal lives.

5. Conclusions

Educators hold the pivotal responsibility of not just imparting knowledge but molding the architects of tomorrow. As our world rapidly evolves, it becomes abundantly clear that mere knowledge retention is insufficient; students must be equipped to navigate complex, ever-changing landscapes autonomously. Thus, a pressing call is made to educators worldwide: integrate self-regulated learning strategies into your pedagogical practices. By doing so, you empower students with the ability to set goals, monitor their progress, adapt to challenges, and foster lifelong learning habits. It is not enough to teach students what to learn; we must show them how to learn. Embedding self-regulated learning in education prepares students for challenges beyond the classroom, making them proactive learners, critical thinkers, and adaptable individuals in any endeavor they pursue. The future of education must prioritize not just the accumulation of knowledge but also the cultivation of the self-regulating learner.

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