

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-REGULATED LEARNING

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Abstract: *Self-regulated learning is a central concept in educational psychology, explained through multiple theoretical perspectives. The operant approach, associated with Burrhus Frederic Skinner, highlights the role of self-control and external reinforcement in guiding goal-directed behaviour, including delaying immediate rewards. The phenomenological perspective emphasizes the role of the self (self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-image) in supporting motivation and engagement in learning. The cognitive component of self-regulation is essential and encompasses cognitive, metacognitive, and critical thinking strategies that facilitate effective information processing and use. Metacognition is pivotal in monitoring and adjusting these processes. The model proposed by Paul R. Pintrich outlines four stages: planning (goal setting and knowledge activation), monitoring (evaluating understanding), control (applying appropriate strategies), and reflection (evaluating performance). Key strategies include active rehearsal, elaboration, organization of information, and critical thinking. Together, these contribute to effective learning and the development of academic competencies by integrating cognitive, motivational, and affective dimensions. The purpose of this scientific paper is to synthesize major theoretical perspectives on self-regulated learning and to highlight their relevance for understanding and improving learning processes in educational contexts.*

Keywords: self-regulated learning, metacognition, cognitive strategies, self-control, critical thinking

1. Introduction

Self-regulated learning is a multifaceted and dynamic process that involves two fundamental dimensions: controlling and regulating the learning process so that the student can effectively acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies transferable to various contexts, and adjusting internal states, thoughts, and behaviours in order to align with specific standards or objectives. Within this process, the learner gains control over emotions, motivation, behaviour, and cognition. To achieve the proposed goals, they engage in strategic behaviours that facilitate performance both at the individual level and in collaborative contexts. Strategic behaviour involves the application of self-regulated learning

strategies organized into three main categories: cognitive strategies – involving the active processing of information through selection, elaboration, and organization in order to deepen understanding; metacognitive strategies – including the processes of planning, monitoring, and regulating cognitive activity; resource management strategies – aimed at the efficient use of internal and external resources (time, environment, social support) necessary for achieving goals.

In addition, according to Paul R. Pintrich [1], self-regulated learning is both malleable and controllable. On the one hand, it can be influenced by various factors and improved through self-reflection and

practice, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, level of knowledge, or motivation. In this sense, self-regulation is not an expression of fluid intelligence, predominantly determined by biological factors, nor is it a fixed trait established early in development. Rather, it functions as a mediator between genetic predispositions, early experiences, and adult functioning.

On the other hand, self-regulated learning is a controllable process, as individuals have the ability to adjust their motivation, behaviour, and cognition with the aim of attaining their objectives. In line with this perspective, Dale H. Schunk and Ertmer [2] consider that individuals who possess the capacity to acquire knowledge are also capable of regulating their own learning and motivation. Theorists have identified a number of defining characteristics of self-regulation. Thus, Dale H. Schunk and Barry J. Zimmerman [3] emphasize that self-regulation differs from self-control through its flexibility and adaptability. Subsequently, the same authors emphasize that self-regulation is inherently dynamic, involving the ongoing evaluation and modification of performance in relation to defined standards. Moreover, the effective regulation of one's own actions depends on the level of awareness of those actions.

2. Self-Regulated Learning: Processes, Strategies, and Determinants of Effective Academic Performance

Self-regulated learning places greater emphasis on how knowledge is acquired rather than on its actual content. This process contributes to students' sense of responsibility, as they must make relevant decisions regarding their own learning experiences, such as selecting appropriate strategies or monitoring their progress. At the same time, self-regulation guides cognitive and motivational processes with the aim of achieving learning goals. Students who possess self-regulation skills continuously adjust their learning process

due to their ability to select, combine, and effectively apply various strategies:

- a. cognitive (for example, critical thinking and problem-solving);
- b. metacognitive (control and knowledge of one's own cognitive processes);
- c. motivational (including self-efficacy and epistemological beliefs);
- d. behavioural.

These strategies enable them to assign personal meaning to information and to make logical connections. In this sense, students use processes such as self-judgment, self-observation, and self-reflection to identify their learning needs, and subsequently rely on specific strategies—goal setting, planning, activation of prior knowledge, metacognitive monitoring, and reflection—to address them. Therefore, self-regulated learning unfolds in stages: it begins with setting goals and planning the activity, continues with monitoring and controlling cognition, motivation, and behaviour during learning, and ends with reflecting on the obtained results. This final stage, the evaluation of the extent to which objectives have been achieved, is essential for further adjustment of effort and optimization of performance.

In addition, responses to external feedback, perceptions of one's own academic achievements, and commitment to learning goals represent central components of self-regulation. While in the initial stages of childhood the development of metacognitive processes occurs relatively naturally, in adolescence it is increasingly influenced by external factors, due to growing academic and social demands. Consequently, determination is an essential factor of self-regulated learning, as a strong intrinsic motivation for learning and for achieving proposed goals is necessary.

The self-regulated learning process is shaped by a set of determinants, such as age, socio-demographic features, motivational factors (evaluations of competence and efficacy, interest, beliefs

about value, and goal orientation), personal attributes (temperament, level of knowledge, metacognitive processes, goals, and affect), behavioural influences (self-judgment, self-observation, and self-reaction), and environmental influences (the structure of the learning context and verbal persuasion). Perceptions of stimuli in the educational environment can generate different emotional responses and can influence students' belief systems and needs, thereby affecting the self-regulation process. For example, supportive and friendly behaviour from the teacher can foster the acquisition of self-regulation among students.

In addition to these factors, Paul R. Pintrich and Zusho [4] highlight the impact of cognitive factors on self-regulatory development through two main mechanisms: on the one hand, they can modify the goals and criteria that guide self-regulation, and on the other hand, they can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of self-regulatory processes.

During the self-regulation process, various obstacles may arise, requiring the reassessment of initial goals and motivational levels, as well as the identification of alternative strategies for progress. These difficulties may include distractions caused by competing activities, a lack of adequate procedural knowledge, challenges in evaluating one's own learning, or low levels of motivational stimulation.

In this context, Paul R. Pintrich [5] emphasizes that students who succeed in self-regulating their learning despite these difficulties achieve higher academic performance compared to those who do not possess such skills. Numerous studies confirm the beneficial outcomes of self-regulated learning on educational performance. Students with self-regulation skills learn more efficiently, expend less effort, and show higher levels of academic fulfillment.

Moreover, self-regulation facilitates the

systematic organization of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in order to achieve proposed goals. Research in the field has identified several dimensions of self-regulated learning, comprising the regulation of behaviour, motivation, cognition, as well as context; the regulation of metacognition, cognition, and motivation; as well as emotional regulation. In the present study, three central components of self-regulated learning were analysed: metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational self-regulation.

Self-regulated learning has long been a major area of interest in educational psychology. This approach places the mechanism of self-control at the center of explanation, through which individuals make decisions aimed at achieving specific goals or outcomes. Often, these decisions involve postponing or foregoing immediate rewards in favour of more substantial future benefits. From this perspective, behaviour is shaped by external reinforcement stimuli, and its likelihood of occurrence increases under conditions of positive reinforcement.

In contrast, phenomenological theory highlights the fundamental importance of the self within the process of learning, as it influences both the motivation to engage and the maintenance of interest in educational activities. Self-regulation is explained through components of the self—such as self-confidence, self-image, and self-esteem—in addition to related mechanisms including self-knowledge, self-evaluation, forming judgments about the value of one's competencies, setting expectations of success or failure, defining self-actualization goals, and evaluating task relevance. Moreover, this perspective emphasizes that self-regulation develops in parallel with processes of self-evaluation, self-awareness, and self-monitoring, in addition to the strengthening of self-image and self-confidence. Overall, these dimensions contribute to the regulation of learning behaviours by integrating affective, cognitive, and motivational

components.

Within self-regulated learning, the cognitive dimension plays a central role, as it involves the processes through which information is processed, organized, and used for the purpose of achieving educational goals. This component includes both the implementation of cognitive strategies and the metacognitive mechanisms responsible for monitoring and adjusting them. Analysing how students regulate their cognitive processes provides a relevant explanatory framework for understanding learning efficiency and for developing academic competencies. The cognitive component of self-regulation comprises three major categories of skills: critical thinking skills, problem-solving strategies, and cognitive strategies. Thus, while cognitive regulation involves selecting and applying appropriate strategies to facilitate understanding and memorization of information, metacognitive processes serve to evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches.

3. Main Theoretical Models of Self-Regulated Learning

With the aim of identifying the processes underlying self-regulated learning, various theorists have developed explanatory models of this construct. These approaches are based on the common assumption that students are active and constructive agents of their own learning, possessing specific goals and the ability to control, monitor, and regulate aspects of behaviour, motivation, and cognition. Self-regulated learning models thus offer a useful conceptual framework for understanding engagement, learning processes, and academic performance across different levels of schooling.

3.1. Cognitive Regulation in Pintrich's Model of Self-Regulated Learning

According to Pintrich's self-regulated learning model, cognitive regulation is structured into four main phases. The first phase, cognitive planning and activation,

entails setting learning objectives and activating relevant knowledge, including metacognitive knowledge. The latter includes: declarative knowledge — referring to the available cognitive strategies; procedural knowledge — concerning how these strategies are used; and conditional knowledge — relating to the context and the appropriate moment for applying these strategies.

The second phase, cognitive monitoring, entails the attunement and continuous evaluation of one's own learning processes. This may manifest either through assessing the degree of comprehension of the studied material or through the emergence of the *feeling of knowing*, specific to situations in which an individual cannot reproduce information but is aware of possessing it.

The third phase, cognitive control and regulation, focuses on the choice and implementation of appropriate cognitive strategies for memorization, reasoning, and problem-solving, such as rehearsal, elaboration, organization of information, the use of visual aids, mnemonic techniques, summarizing, paraphrasing, and constructing graphical representations.

Finally, the phase of cognitive response and reflection involves evaluating performance and making judgments about one's own competence in completing academic tasks.

Rehearsal, elaboration, organization, and critical thinking strategies are considered fundamental for the effective regulation of learning. Rehearsal facilitates the consolidation of information through repeated exposure, using techniques such as reviewing notes or repeating definitions. However, its effectiveness depends on the nature of processing: active rehearsal, characterized by deep processing and meaning-making, is superior to passive rehearsal based on mechanical repetition.

Advanced forms of elaboration include collaborative activities such as debates or reciprocal teaching, which contribute to identifying and correcting gaps in understanding. Organizational strategies

involve structuring information through graphical representations or highlighting main ideas, their effectiveness depending on the level of cognitive processing; thus, simple underlining is less effective than creating schemes that capture relationships between concepts.

Finally, critical thinking includes skills such as identifying relevant sources, evaluating the validity of information, and formulating well-argued judgments. By activating these processes, students critically analyze learned content, constructing arguments that support or challenge it [6].

3.2. Boekaerts' Multi-Component Model of Self-Regulated Learning

The self-regulated learning model proposed by Boekaerts [7] includes six main components: domain-specific knowledge and skills, encompassing both theoretical and procedural knowledge, along with erroneous conceptions and inert knowledge; cognitive processing strategies, including selective attention, elaboration, rehearsal, structuring, summarizing, and question generation; cognitive self-regulation strategies, which involve the cognitive representation of educational goals, the formulation of study plans, monitoring progress, and evaluating objective attainment; motivational beliefs, including attitudes, task-related values, perceptions of one's own abilities, and goal orientation; motivational strategies, such as initiating the intention to learn, using coping mechanisms to manage stress and negative emotions, avoiding effort, or seeking social resources; and the cognitive representation of intended behaviour, which involves linking intention to an action plan and maintaining it despite obstacles.

3.3. Winne and Hadwin's Phased Information-Processing Model

The model proposed by Winne and Hadwin [8] structures self-regulated learning into four distinct phases: task definition, a stage in which students construct an understanding of the requirements; goal

setting and planning, which involves formulating objectives and developing strategies to achieve them; tactics implementation, consisting of applying appropriate strategies to accomplish the task; and metacognitive adaptation of study strategies, a stage in which students make long-term adjustments regarding motivation, beliefs, and the strategies they use. These phases are recursive in nature, as the outcomes of each stage can influence the unfolding of subsequent stages.

3.4. Zimmerman's Cyclical Model of Self-Regulated Learning

The cyclical model of self-regulated learning proposed by Barry J. Zimmerman [9], grounded in social-cognitive learning theories, highlights the cyclical nature of this process. Thus, feedback obtained from prior performance is used to adjust actions in subsequent stages. The model includes three main phases, each integrating subprocesses of self-regulation that encompass metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and affective dimensions: The initial phase comprises processes that precede and prepare action and includes two components: task analysis, which entails establishing objectives and strategy development, and motivational self-beliefs, such as self-efficacy, intrinsic task value, outcome expectations, and goal orientation. The execution phase includes: self-control, which optimizes effort through strategies such as self-instruction, the use of mental imagery, attentional focus, and the application of appropriate strategies; and self-observation, achieved through self-recording and metacognitive monitoring.

The self-reflection phase includes: self-judgment, which involves assessing one's own performance and assigning causes to the results; and reactions, expressed through adaptive or defensive responses and levels of personal satisfaction.

It can be observed that the model proposed by Barry J. Zimmerman retains many characteristics also found in the model developed by Paul R. Pintrich, thus

outlining a comprehensive perspective on self-regulated learning. Currently, these two models are widely used in research, providing consistent explanations of the self-regulated learning process. In the present paper, we have relied on the model developed by Paul R. Pintrich.

4. Cognitive Self-Regulation

The regulation of cognition involves, on the one hand, the student's efforts to monitor, control, and adjust their cognitive processes according to the requirements and conditions of the task, and on the other hand, the ability to manage and effectively use the knowledge and skills they possess. In this sense, cognitive self-regulation entails developing a plan to achieve objectives, selecting appropriate cognitive strategies, evaluating their effectiveness, and adapting them when difficulties arise.

The cognitive dimension of self-regulation comprises three main categories of skills: cognitive strategies, problem-solving strategies, and critical thinking skills [10]. While cognitive regulation is achieved through the selection and application of cognitive strategies to facilitate understanding and retention of information, metacognitive processes serve to verify the effectiveness of these efforts.

According to Paul R. Pintrich, cognitive regulation can be analyzed in the context of the self-regulated learning model, structured into four phases:

a. Cognitive planning and activation – involves setting goals, activating relevant knowledge and metacognitive knowledge, which include: declarative knowledge (about available cognitive strategies), procedural knowledge (about how to use them), and conditional knowledge (about when and why to apply these strategies).

b. Cognitive monitoring – involves awareness and continuous evaluation of the level of understanding. This may take the form of critical self-assessment of learning or the “feeling of knowing,” a situation in which the individual has the impression of

possessing the information, even if they cannot access it immediately.

c. Cognitive control and regulation – refers to selecting and using appropriate cognitive strategies for memorization, reasoning, and problem-solving. These include rehearsal, elaboration, organization of information, the use of visual aids, mnemonic techniques, summarizing, paraphrasing, and creating diagrams.

d. Cognitive response and reflection – focuses on evaluating performance and one's own competencies in relation to the task, as well as making judgments about the effectiveness of the strategies used. Elaboration, organization, critical thinking, and rehearsal strategies are considered essential for the effective regulation of learning.

5. Motivational Self-Regulation

The regulation of motivation involves modifying the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions generated by a task in order to initiate and sustain the desire to engage, overcome obstacles, and increase the level of effort and commitment in academic activities. This process is closely related to metacognitive regulation and is influenced by factors such as cognitive abilities, personality traits, motivational level, and the learning context. At the same time, motivational self-regulation involves managing the motivational beliefs described in achievement motivation theory, such as self-efficacy, goal orientation, task value, and personal interest. The regulation of these beliefs is influenced by the individual's level of awareness and monitoring and involves three main stages:

a. Motivational knowledge – involves understanding the nature of motivation and the factors that influence it, as well as awareness of how these aspects can be used to increase engagement in learning;

b. Motivational monitoring – involves the continuous observation of one's level of motivation during learning activities and

identifying the factors that lead to a decrease in interest, based on internal or external feedback;

c. Motivational control – consists of active intervention through the use of specific strategies to maintain or increase motivation.

In this context, Wolters [11] introduces the concept of **motivational metacognition**, which involves awareness of one's own level of motivation, the determinants of it, and the effective techniques for regulating it. In order to stimulate cognitive engagement and maintain interest in learning activities, the literature proposes various motivational regulation strategies. According to the model developed by Paul R. Pintrich, these can be organized into three main components:

a. Value components – include task value, intrinsic goal orientation, and extrinsic goal orientation. Extrinsic goal orientation is based on external factors, such as obtaining good grades, rewards, or social recognition. In contrast, intrinsic goal orientation is driven by personal interest, curiosity, and the desire for knowledge.

b. Expectancy system components – refer to self-efficacy beliefs and the anticipation of success;

c. Affective component – includes emotional reactions associated with learning activities, such as anxiety or satisfaction.

Therefore, motivational self-regulation represents a core element of self-regulated learning, as it supports the initiation, maintenance, and direction of learning behavior, significantly contributing to academic performance.

The regulation of the learning process is achieved through five metacognitive processes: planning, goal setting, self-control, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Additionally, five dimensions of metacognitive self-regulation can be identified:

- **Knowledge about cognition** – involves identifying optimal learning strategies and effectively using cognitive skills;

- **Objectivity** – involves the capacity to analyze one's own learning process from an external perspective;

- **Problem representation** – refers to the complete and accurate understanding of the task;

- **Monitoring of sub-tasks** – involves breaking complex tasks into sub-tasks and tracking their progress;

- **Evaluation** – consists of reviewing strategies and problem-solving approaches. According to the model proposed by Paul R. Pintrich, metacognitive self-regulation is achieved through three fundamental processes: planning, monitoring, and regulation. Thus, the pupil or student sets goals, analyzes tasks by formulating questions and personal interpretations, monitors their level of understanding, and adapts their cognitive strategies and behavior to improve performance.

From a metacognitive perspective, students who possess self-regulation skills are distinguished by their ability to organize, plan, self-monitor, self-instruct, and self-evaluate. Moreover, they use metacognition to identify and capitalize on their own resources in solving academic tasks. The capacity to differentiate between known and unknown information facilitates review and relearning processes, avoiding redundancy in learning.

In the educational literature, the terms *academic performance*, *academic achievement*, and *learning outcomes* are frequently used. Although they are sometimes considered equivalent, many authors highlight conceptual differences among them and propose a clear distinction: **academic performance** refers to observable and measurable behaviors, typically quantified through scores obtained on tests and short-term assessments; **academic achievement** concerns the attainment of educational goals through sustained effort, reflecting a medium- and

long-term perspective; while **learning outcomes** represent a broader concept that includes both performance and achievement, as well as attitudinal dimensions. At the same time, learning outcomes involve the evaluation of actions that may influence future behaviors and are more often associated with curricular objectives than with the measurement process itself. In this sense, learning outcomes reflect concrete effects of the educational process, demonstrated through the application of acquired knowledge.

In the same vein, Fineburg [12] emphasizes that academic achievement indicates the progress made within an educational context, being measured through exam grades, standardized test scores, or subject-specific assessments. Moreover, the results of the meta-analysis conducted by Lei et al. (2018) highlight that academic achievement constitutes a relevant indicator of academic engagement.

Finally, the authors argue that academic results can trigger different emotional reactions, either positive or negative. Individuals experiencing success tend to display happiness, confidence, and personal satisfaction, whereas those facing failure may experience sadness, frustration, or depression. In addition, these results play a fundamental role both during the years of study and after their completion, potentially serving as an indicator in choosing future careers. Goal orientation in learning is of fundamental importance in the learning process, as it helps students direct their efforts and allocate the necessary resources to achieve their intended goals. Furthermore, having clear learning goals can increase students' motivation and engagement in the learning process, as these goals are aligned with their interests and aspirations; moreover, students know exactly what they need to do. Self-regulated learning strategies support the attainment of learning goals by providing students with a variety of techniques and learning approaches that they can adapt to their

needs. Additionally, self-regulated learning enables self-monitoring and self-evaluation of the extent to which learning goals have been achieved.

It is also worth noting that students' personality traits can influence how goal orientation interacts with self-regulated learning strategies. In some cases, personality traits may weaken or strengthen the relationship between these two variables. For example, openness to experience, in the present research, attenuated the relationship between mastery goal orientation and metacognitive regulation, as well as between performance-oriented goals and practice, respectively metacognitive regulation; whereas conscientiousness strengthened the positive relationship between performance goal orientation and practice.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, self-regulated learning emerges as a complex, multidimensional theoretical construct that is essential for understanding effective academic learning processes. The analysis of the theoretical perspectives presented highlights that self-regulation is not simply a set of cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational strategies, but a dynamic process in which these dimensions are continuously integrated and shaped by personal, contextual, and socio-educational factors.

Theoretical models proposed by Pintrich, Zimmerman, Boekaerts, and Winne & Hadwin converge on the central idea that the learner is an active agent of their own learning process, capable of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their educational activities. From this perspective, self-regulation is characterized as a cyclical, adaptive, and reflective process, in which feedback and self-assessment play a decisive role in optimizing academic performance.

Moreover, the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational dimensions of self-regulation demonstrate the strong

interdependence between knowledge acquisition, control of learning processes, and the maintenance of engagement in academic tasks. The studies analyzed confirm that students who develop these competencies achieve higher academic performance, demonstrate increased learning efficiency, and experience greater satisfaction with their educational progress. In addition, the influence of contextual factors and personality traits underscores the flexible nature of self-regulation, showing that it can be developed and enhanced through appropriate educational interventions. In this regard, teachers'

contribution and the educational context becomes essential in fostering intrinsic motivation, reflection, and the application of efficient learning strategies.

Therefore, self-regulated learning should not be viewed only as an academic competence, but as a fundamental skill for lifelong learning. Its development contributes not only to academic success, but also to the formation of autonomous individuals capable of effectively managing their own learning processes in diverse and continuously changing contexts.

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