Chapter 4
Self–Regulated Learners: Strategies That Promote Self–Regulated Learning in Online Environments

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ABSTRACT

Methods of online instruction are becoming a staple in academia, and the rapid growth of online learning has prompted a need to incorporate self-regulated learning strategies. There are three phases of self-regulated learning that students employ to initiate plans to complete a task or accomplish a goal. The performance phase describes the processes students use while working towards the completion of a task or goal. In the self-reflection phase, students reflect on their progress towards the task or goal, or the results if they have completed the task. During the final stage, students use that information to inform their future decisions about completing the task or goal or begin a new one.

INTRODUCTION

Online undergraduate and graduate student enrollment has increased in post-secondary institutions. In fact, from 2002 to 2010, the number of students taking at least one lone course increased from 1.6 million students to over six million students (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Clearly, students are enrolling in more online courses and programs, and many experts anticipate that online enrollments will continue to outpace traditional enrollment for the foreseeable future (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). However, online learning is not without challenges (Wandler & Imbriale, 2017). Attrition rates in online learning can be twice as high as traditional classroom formats (Levy, 2007). A major culprit of these attrition rates is a lack of self-regulation skills (Lee & Choi, 2011).

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In addition to the growing enrollment in technology-mediated environments, asynchronous online courses are receiving growing attention in higher education for their ability to accommodate large numbers of students. Students can communicate with teachers and peers independently as well as schedule time to complete assignments around their schedules (Kim, Yoon, Jo, & Branch, 2018). While time-independent delivery modes benefit students who work at different paces and utilize different learning strategies, students often report difficulties sustaining commitment in online courses because they are required to independently plan and manage their own learning (Broadbent & Poon, 2015; So, 2016; van Rooij & Zirkle, 2016). Furthermore, students may not recognize the effort or organization that is required to be successful in online courses (Cho & Shen, 2013).

While previous generations experienced difficulty with access to technology, current and incoming students do not have these same issues. In fact, students are surrounded with digital devices in their daily lives which eliminates the need to expend additional effort to use technology and it is assumed to be a natural part of their environment (Oblinger, 2003). As online enrollments have grown and provided more opportunities to learners, so too has scholarly interest in how to teach students to direct their own learning and motivation (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004; Green & Azevedo, 2007). Academic motivation has been operationalized as students’ movement toward and engagement in learning activities (Artino & Stephens, 2009). Self-regulated learners are characterized as committed participants who efficiently control their own learning experiences, organize and rehearse newly learned content, monitor their thinking processes, seek help when they do not understand, and hold positive emotional beliefs about their abilities and values for learning (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). Motivated learners move quickly at the opportunity to learn and persevere even if they experience difficulty. The awareness and adjustment recursively interplay in the process of enhancing student self-regulation and learning (Zimmerman, 2002).

The term self-regulation is the regulation of one’s thinking and actions (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). A self-regulated learner uses metacognitive, motivation, and behavioral processes to achieve specific learning goals (Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman, 2011). This includes evaluating the effectiveness of specific strategies to complete a learning task, monitoring progress, and adjusting strategies when necessary (Baker & Brown, 1984). Furthermore, these processes enable a learner to initiate and focus on goal-directed activities while ignoring distractions and setbacks (Corno, 1994; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014; Zimmerman, 2011). For example, students may give extra thought to how they learn and the strategies they will need to employ to be successful in coursework (Wandler & Imbriale, 2017). Thus, skillful self-regulated learners master and deliberately control their own learning by setting goals, choosing and applying different strategies to meet their goals, and reflecting on their progress and making adaptations as needed (Dettori & Persico, 2008). Furthermore, self-regulated learners are often intrinsically motivated, have higher academic self-efficacy, and see learning as a proactive activity; in other words, they actively control rather than passively endure the process of learning (Dettori & Persico).

Self-regulated learners engage in metacognitive processes when consciously thinking about and evaluating the cognitive processes they are using (McCormick, 2003). A student who is a self-regulated learner actively uses specific strategies called self-regulated learning strategies (SRLS) (Perry & Rahim, 2011; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). For instance, a self-regulated learner may keep track of their time spent studying using a planner. While self-regulation strategies include components such as self-efficacy and metacognitive activities, students may struggle using them in technology-mediated learning environments.
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