

FACTORS INFLUENCE STUDENTS SELF-REGULATION LEARNING TOWARDS THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is about assessing the factors that mainly influence students' self-regulation learning towards their overall academic achievement in undergraduate programs in Ethiopia and to suggest possible remedies. To attain this objective, different qualitative techniques of survey open-ended questions, focus group discussion items to the group of undergraduate students and interview format to some key informants were prepared and used. To this regard, most of the research participants argued and emphasized that self regulated learning is an important component of learning. In which students who has use self capacity to control his behavior and learning will better successfully acquire his academic achievement than students who has not used or applied self capacities to control his behavior and learning. Nevertheless, participants mainly listed as factors that hinder the use of self-regulation learning are the use and method of classifying, assigning and placing undergraduate students to different colleges and departments, the lack of study place and conducive environment is the other impediment to the students' level of using their self-regulation learning, the use and application of continuous assessment unknowingly hampered students' self-regulation learning. In which students are completely congested beyond their capacity to shoulder with many learning tasks with different courses in a certain period of time. So students have faced serious problem in managing and accomplishing all the given tasks equally, lacks of fundamental resources for education like reference books, handouts and shortage of technological resources in the universities.

Keywords: Self-Regulation Learning, Academic Achievement, and Undergraduate

INTRODUCTION

The current study focused specifically on assessing the factors that mainly influence students' use of self-regulation learning towards their overall academic achievement in undergraduate programs in Ethiopian Universities and to suggest possible remedies. The study purposively confines itself to the two universities known as Gondar and Jimma Universities. This is because of that both of the universities are offering courses to the study population of Medicine, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences colleges. Accordingly, the specified universities relatively having longer years of experience in teaching particularly in Medicine field of study in the country. Thus, the study does not include newly established Universities, private universities and any kind of colleges. In relation to the specified topic, according to Zimmerman (1988), self-regulated learners are individuals who are "metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (p. 4).

Research has revealed that high achievers reported more use of self-regulated learning strategies than lower achieving students (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1991; VanZile-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999), and the assumptions of self-regulated learning offer optimistic implications for teaching and learning. Self-regulation is neither a measure of mental intelligence that is unchangeable after a certain point in life nor a personal characteristic that is genetically based or formed early in life. Students learn self-regulation through experience and self-reflection (Pintrich, 1995). Teachers can teach in ways that help students become self regulating learners. Since self-regulation is not a personality trait, students can control their behaviors and affect in order to improve their academic learning and performance. In addition, self-regulated learning is particularly appropriate for college students, as they have great control over their own time schedule, and how they approach their studying and learning (Pintrich, 1995).

When self-regulated learners find inadequate learning strategies, they regulate their learning activities. Regulating refers to "the fine-tuning and continuous adjustment of one's cognitive activities" (Pintrich et al., 1991, p. 23). Regulating activities enhance learning by employing a feedback loop during learning and self monitoring training has been found to enhance performance across a wide variety of academic measures. Thus, students can become better learners if they become more aware of their learning and then choose to act on that awareness.

Therefore, Student self-regulation is generally accepted as an important construct in student success (William and Hellman, 2004). A large body of research has demonstrated that self-regulation (i.e., planning, setting goals, and monitoring one's learning processes) is an important factor in learning and achievement (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the current study is mainly focused on assessing the factors that influence students' use of self-regulation learning towards their overall academic achievement in undergraduate programs in Ethiopian Universities and to suggest possible remedies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several studies have found that self-regulation of cognition and behavior is an important aspect of student learning and academic performance in the classroom context (Corno & Mandinach, 1983; Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985). There are a variety of definitions of self-regulated learning, but three components seem especially important for classroom performance. First, self-regulated learning includes students' metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and modifying their cognition (e.g. Zimmerman & Pons, 1986, 1988). Students' management and control of their effort on classroom academic tasks has been proposed as another important component. For example, capable students who persist at a difficult task or block out distractors (i.e., noisy classmates) maintain their cognitive engagement in the task, enabling them to perform better (Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985). A third important aspect of self-regulated learning that some researchers have included in their conceptualization is the actual cognitive strategies that students use to learn, remember, and understand the material (Corno & Mandinach, 1983; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986, 1988). Different cognitive strategies such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational strategies have been found to foster active cognitive engagement in learning and result in higher levels of achievement.

Further, studies have clearly shown that Learning and using self-regulation skills are very important to achieving success in the academic arena and can make the difference between achieving and underachieving. Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997) juxtaposed the self-regulatory processes of underachievers and achievers. Based on their own research and review of existing literature, there is a clear demarcation of the differences between these two groups of students. Achievers managed and used their study time well. They set higher specific and proximal goals for themselves. Achievers monitored their progress more frequently and accurately. They also set higher standards for satisfaction in relationship to progress and outcome. Achievers were also more self-efficacious and persisted despite obstacles. In contrast, underachievers were more impulsive in terms of the use of their time. They set lower academic goals and monitored their progress less frequently and less accurately. Underachievers were more self-critical, less self-efficacious, and gave up more readily. Because self-regulation is so important for students to achieve self-chosen academic goals, it would be useful to understand what might go awry in the process of self-regulated learning.

It is widely accepted that students who are able to successfully regulate their effort initiate learning tasks, set goals, decide on appropriate strategies to achieve their goals, then monitor and evaluate their progress will likely do better than students who do not. However, possessing knowledge of cognitive and meta-cognitive self-regulated learning strategies is not enough to enhance student learning and academic performance; students must also be motivated to use their meta-cognitive strategies to build upon their understanding of instructional material.

There are about four general assumptions about self-regulated learning perspectives. Pintrich (2004) synthesized these four assumptions as follows. The first assumption is the active constructive assumption that learners are assumed to construct their own meanings, goals, and strategies from the information available in the external environment as well as information in their own minds (the internal environment). The second assumption is the

potential for control assumption. It is assumed that learners can potentially monitor, control, and regulate certain aspects of their own cognition, motivation, and behavior as well as some features of their environments. The ideas behind this assumption dose mean that some monitoring, control, and regulation is possible. The third one is about the goal, criterion, or standard assumption. Here it is assumed that there is some type of goal, criterion, or standard against which comparisons are made in order to assess whether the learning process should continue as it is or if some type of change is necessary. Here the general expectation is that individuals can set standards or goals to strive for in their learning, monitor their progress toward these goals, and then adapt and regulate their cognition, motivation, and behavior in order to reach their goals. The fourth assumption is that self regulatory activities are mediators between personal and contextual characteristics and actual performance or achievement. An individual's self-regulation mechanisms of his/her cognition, motivation, and behavior mediate the relations between the person, context, and eventual achievement.

In addition, many research findings also indicated that research investigating the relationship between self-regulated learning and academic achievement has generally found self-regulated learning to be positively related to academic achievement across education levels and subject areas (e.g. Lindner and Harris, 1993; Van Den Hurk, 2006). The positive role of self-regulated learning has been demonstrated in various studies for both the motivational as well as the learning strategy aspects of self-regulated learning. Research into the motivational aspect of self-regulated learning normally has shown that academic achievement was associated with internal motivation (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia and McKeachie, 1993), internal locus of control (individual's beliefs that the outcomes of their actions were dependent on what they did). Positive relationships between academic achievement and cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Rebovich, Brooks and Peterson, 1998), environment management (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986), time management, effort regulation, and help seeking (Rebovich, Brooks and Peterson, 1998) have also been found.

METHODOLOGY

Most studies of self-regulated learning of undergraduate students have been conducted among different countries were mainly quantitative survey in their nature and design. However, somewhat differently this study attempt to design and use some qualitative techniques based on the general objective of the study. Therefore this study used qualitative techniques of which consisted of open-ended questions that required participants to openly comment on the perceived problems and recommendations in the relationship of the students' self-regulated learning towards their academic achievement, focus group discussion items to the group of undergraduate students, and interview format to some key informants were prepared and utilized so as to get the relevant information.

The main population for this study was a sample taken from first year to third year Medicine, Natural sciences and Social sciences public undergraduate students in Gondar and Jimma universities in the year 2011/12. Besides, universities faculty deans, department heads, and concerned office bearers like registrar, were the target population of this study. Data collection began November 2011 and concluded January 2012.

In addition to the survey open-ended items for the qualitative information, focus group discussion and interview were also utilized. The focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted on 8-12 undergraduate students that represent each college and year level in each university. Similarly, interviews were conducted with some key informants like who have direct contact and valuable evidences on the stated study variables have been well considered. These were university registrars, colleges' deans and some purposefully selected department heads from each college. Data related to background and entry variables were also secured from the various departments and college registrar offices.

During the focus group discussion (FGD), both female and male undergraduate students were reminded of their participation in order to provide a brief explanation of the focus and purpose of the study. In a focus group discussion using the FGD format, in which designed by the researchers based on the major study objective of this study, questions were developed for students to discuss to the psychological constructs of self-regulated learning in relation to their academic achievement.

In addition, basic interview questions were also designed and used by the researchers, based on the objective of this study to some key informants in order to elicit information about their undergraduate students' self-regulated learning behaviors towards to the learning gains and academic success.

RESULT OF THE STUDY

Qualitative evidences obtained in this study are treated as follows: The main factors that influence students' use of self-regulation learning towards their overall academic achievement in undergraduate programs in Ethiopian Universities are:

1. Method of classifying and placing undergraduate students to different colleges and departments.
2. The lack of study place and conducive environment.
3. Inappropriate use and application of continuous assessment.
4. Shortages of fundamental and technological resources in the universities.
5. Students lack of confidence.
6. Students' inadequacy of planning to their academic tasks.
7. The lack of using various teaching methods by the instructors.

Method of Classifying and Placing Undergraduate Students to Different Colleges and Departments

As per the responses obtained from the FGD and open-ended items, students in colleges of Natural sciences and social sciences, almost all of them primarily identify and complain that the method and use of classifying, assigning and placing undergraduate students to different colleges and departments, during first year while entering to the universities are not appropriate and fair. As a result this hinders their self-regulation learning towards learning throughout their stay in the universities. They further explained that mainly at the beginning only some students who have got a higher grade point average at the high school national exam are able to enter to their own selected colleges and departments. However, many of the

students are assigned and placed without the knowledge of their own interest, and attitude towards different fields of studies and departments.

To this regard, most of the undergraduate students are obliged to learn to the field of studies for which they are not primarily predisposed and interested. Consecutively this will mainly perverted and hold back their self-regulation learning to their fields of studies.

The lack of study place and conducive environment

From the interview and open-ended questions revealed by both key informants and students that additionally factor in hindering undergraduate students self-regulation learning is the lack of study place and conducive environment in the universities. This in turn is considered as main impediment to the students' level of using their self-regulation learning towards their academic activities. The other related factor that affects the students' self-regulation learning to their learning is the problem and lack of students' time management particularly in using time to their academic tasks.

Inappropriate use and application of continuous assessment

In line with this, from the FGD and open-ended questions students markedly explained that the current policy used by the universities in relation to continuous assessment unknowingly hampered students' self-regulation learning. In which by almost all the teachers various assignments, projects, and tests are provided in different courses with in a very limited period of time. Some instructors misuse the concept of continuous assessment by always challenging students in each week by their own course. These instructors are mostly forgetting the existence of other related courses which are also given to the students on a similar pattern through continuous assessment. Therefore, the application of the policy towards continuous assessment is not well implemented. In which, some instructors are used the procedure of continuous assessment as a means of punishment for students who do not have close relation to the teachers. To this regard, students are completely congested beyond their capacity to shoulder with many learning tasks in a certain period of time. So students will face serious problem in managing and accomplishing all the given tasks equally. Eventually, this will tend to influence the undergraduate students self-regulation learning towards their overall academic achievement.

Shortages of fundamental and technological resources in the universities

Again for most of the students and key informants the other problem to the stated issue is that the lacks of fundamental resources for educational processes like reference books and handouts and shortage of technological resources in the universities such as lack of access to the internet services, laboratory, laboratory equipments and chemicals and the like. Besides, the students' economical problem has also an effect on the level of availability and getting the learning materials like the teachers handouts, other related photocopied learning resources and so on.

Students lack of confidence

Most of the key informants through interview and some students in the open-ended questions elucidated that the other hold back factor for undergraduate students' self-regulation learning towards their academic achievement, is because of the fact that primarily most of the students perceive themselves as if they were incapable and have no potential to do well in

their fields of study. So most of the students lack confidence on what they are doing in their different courses. Thus, this will in turn affect the students' level of motivation to hard work on their academic activities and may lead students to failure than achieving higher in their academic achievement.

Students' inadequacy of planning to their academic tasks

Somewhat differently key informants also explained that most of the students who have joined the universities are inadequate in planning and not well programmed to their academic activities. To this regard, key informants also revealed that most of the undergraduate students after joining the universities, even are not able to study hard as previous time as to pass the high school final exam. So most students after entering to the universities, they feel as if they were accomplished all the academic tasks and their effort-regulation to learning activities become highly affected.

The lack of using various teaching methods by the instructors

From the FGD and open-ended questions the researchers also come to understand that undergraduate students self-regulation learning towards their academic achievement in the universities is mainly affected by the instructors teaching methodology used in various classes. In higher education most of the instructors are using a lecture method which is a one way directional to the teaching-learning processes that always flows teaching from the instructors to the students. So students would not be able to explain their experiences and ideas with their instructors, the students' relation with their teachers are highly restrained and related with the final grades, students' interactions are not well encouraged and this finally will tend to have an effect on students confidence, self-esteem and self regulation to their academic achievement. In addition, students are mostly frustrated to ask and get assistances from their teachers while they are facing academic difficulties and other related problems to their education.

DISCUSSION

In general, to the above stated factors in relation to self-regulation learning and academic achievement many scholars in educational psychology confirmed that Self-regulation is essential to the learning process (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011). It can help students create better learning habits and strengthen their study skills, apply learning strategies to enhance academic outcomes (Harris, Friedlander, Sadler, Frizzelle, & Graham, 2005), monitor their performance (Harris et al., 2005), and evaluate their academic progress (De Bruin, Thiede & Camp, 2011). Teachers thus should be familiar with the factors that influence a learner's ability to self-regulate and the strategies they can use to identify and promote self-regulated learning (SRL) in their classrooms. In addition to self-regulation, motivation can have a pivotal impact on students' academic outcomes. Without motivation, SRL is much more difficult to achieve.

In addition, to get rid of the problems associated with self-regulation learning most of the key informants and FGD participants believed that learning about self-regulation mechanisms in higher education plays a paramount role for being successful in academic achievement. In relation to this recently a set of tools for students to use in practicing self-regulation – learning was proposed by Zimmerman (1990). According to this scholar, a self-regulated learner should practiced the characteristics like self-regulation, organization and

transformation, goal setting and planning, information seeking, record keeping, self monitoring, environment structuring, giving self consequences, rehearsing, memorizing, seeking social assistance and reviewing. These characteristics show how actively involved a self-regulated learner must be.

Moreover, (Linder and Harris, 1993) explained that under self-regulated learning, the learning strategies that are strategies the learner is aware of and how they utilize them. Students need the skills to handle various learning situations. This means a shift from content to skill development. Giving the student a system of strategies and helping to develop them is a major step towards creating self-regulated learners.

On the other hand, , most of the students responded that even though self-regulation is an important component of learning for college students they have not got any training and education in their universities. But most of them believed and discussed that mainly they have got this crucial element traditionally from their financial supporters, elder brothers, sisters and other relatives.

However, to the above mentioned issue (Pintrich, 1995) have discussed that self-regulated learning is an important component of learning for college students. Students can learn how to become self-regulated learners and faculty or college can foster self-regulated learning in their class rooms.

In addition most learning occurs outside of the regular school lifetime. For this reason it is important to use the time in school to prepare students not only for learning the set curriculum but also to give them the skill to learn in the less defined world around them. The jobs of today and the future require workers who can problem solve, think creatively, and work in a successful team environment. They must be able to generate dynamic solutions to changing objectives. There must be more emphasis in developing these skills before the students enter the job market. The skills of the work place must become important skills of the school market.

Thus, by teaching students to be more self-regulative, teachers may experience greater success in promoting academic achievement, motivation and lifelong learning. Spending a marginal amount of time each day demonstrating how specific self-regulation strategies can improve students' learning can go a long way to helping them prepare for challenging learning tasks and assessments. Ultimately, if our goal is to create successful life-long learners, then we must first ensure that we teach them the strategies necessary for that journey.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the results obtained the researchers would like to formulate the following specific practical implications and recommendations.

Primarily assessing students' background with respect to their learning interest, and ability should be identified at high school level or before joining higher education. This will demand the use of tests of different sorts, such as achievement tests, aptitude tests, interest tests, attitude tests, personality tests, standardized tests and the like. I think this should be practiced in higher institutions before students joining different colleges and departments. So this will play an essential role in selecting and harmonizing higher education students with

their future disciplines and carriers. As a result, this will create conducive condition in reducing measurement errors and used to select proper human resources for at least related disciplines and future carriers.

All students should have to use time effectively and study hard to enhance their academic achievement. Besides, undergraduate students should attend all the courses based on the learning schedules and able to arrange enough study time to all the undertaken courses properly. In addition, undergraduate students should be able to study in groups and assist each other in peers so as to develop their own skills to wards different challenging learning activities.

Universities should be capable in providing and availing different learning materials to the students. I think the availability of reference books, access for internet services, laboratory equipments and chemicals will tend to have an effect on the level of students-self regulation learning to their learning deeds. Similarly, universities in collaboration with psychology department should design and provide various learning and training programs in different psychological processes. Like in the areas of how to design study program, use study skills, and enhance their self-regulation learning etc. The programs can be provided at the beginning, at the middle, and at the end of each semester. Eventually, it will be possible to make students conscious and capable in how to properly manage different academic activities.

In relation to the above issue, creating self-regulated learning environments for the complex and diverse range of backgrounds, skill sets, and personalities that many students encompass poses challenges to even for the most experienced teachers. Fortunately a great deal of literature showcases a variety of effective instructional strategies for encouraging self-regulation in the class room (Andreassen and Braten, 2011; Decorte, Mason, Depaepe, & Verschaffel, 2011). Some of these strategies include direct instruction and modeling, guided and independent practice, social support and feedback, and reflective practice.

In sum, self-regulation enables students to develop and learn constructive behaviors that affect one's learning. These behaviors are planned and adapted to support the pursuit of personal goals in changing learning environments. Learners with high levels of self regulation have good control over how they attain their goals. Conscious self regulation requires a student to focus on the process of how to acquire these skills. Many researchers agree with the importance of self regulated learning for students at all academic levels, and the principle that self regulation can be taught, learned, and controlled. In fact, in Zimmerman's studies, successful students reported that the use of self regulated learning strategies was directly tied to their success in school.

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