

# Self-regulated learning: What is all the fuss about?

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From a lifespan perspective, the constant improvement of knowledge, skills, and competencies through education has become unavoidable. To meet this challenge and to become a successful lifelong learner, competence in self-regulation is crucial. Hence, knowing how to regulate one's own learning activities has become an important survival tool. It plays a central role in positively influencing learning in and outside the educational context.

## 1. What is self-regulated learning?

Kindergarteners who persist when they encounter challenging tasks, school kids who review their homework before submitting it, or university students who adapt different learning strategies to prepare adequately for a test. All have one thing in common: They successfully self-regulate their learning and use different strategies to master challenges. From an educational psychological perspective, self-regulated learning refers to the active role of the learners in autonomously guiding their learning. It includes control, monitoring, and evaluation of thoughts, feeling, and actions. Thus, the competence of self-regulated learning is multi-layered and involves the use of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural competencies in constantly recurring phases. Learners, motivate themselves, set goals, and plan their learning in the pre-action phase; monitor their learning, use strategies to process information, and stay motivated in the

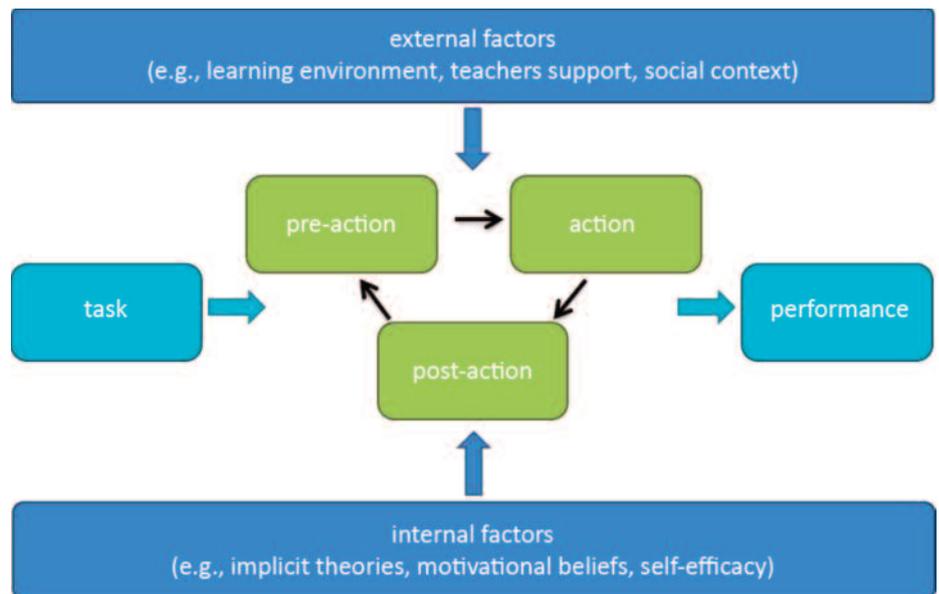


Figure 1: Process model of self-regulated learning

action phase; and evaluate their progress in the post-action phase. Self-regulated learners take responsibility for their performance and have control over their learning. They know that successful learning is not something that happens to them; it is something that they make happen.

Self-regulated learning is a highly task-specific process, influenced by internal factors such as learner's beliefs, values, goals, motivation, and particularly the outcomes they expect in a given task. Based on their motivation, learners – even kindergarteners – select which goals to pursue, which strategies to use and how long to persist in their pursuit of goals. For example, learners with high self-efficacy beliefs may judge the probability of

succeeding in a particular task as higher and consequently may be more willing to self-regulate their learning. Not all beliefs are adaptive for self-regulated learning. For instance, some students come to believe that human attributes are more innate and fixed (fixed mind-set) and cannot be substantially improved or developed by learning. This fixed mind-set hinders self-regulated learning behaviour and leads to a constant need to prove one's abilities, rather than put the effort into improving the ability. Further, self-regulated learning is influenced by external factors such as task demands and characteristics, support by teacher, learning environment, and social context. For example, if the task is too simple, learners do not need to use their self-regulated learning

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competence as the task can be easily solved without extra effort.

### **2. How important is self-regulated learning for higher performance?**

Most adults think school education should focus only on improving academic skills, such as math or language. However, it is just as important to teach students how to regulate their motivation, thoughts and behaviour. Several studies have shown that the competence of successfully self-regulating one's own learning is an important predictor for higher performance from childhood to adulthood. Longitudinal studies from different fields of research have shown that learners who better regulate their learning, earn higher grades in different school domains, get higher diplomas, are less likely to drop out of university, and perform better in standardised achievement tests. Recently, studies have even shown that self-regulated learning is a stronger predictor of school performance than intelligence. Even beyond the academic context, higher self-regulated learning competence is related to a broad range of mental and physical aspects, such as less drinking, less obesity and better physical health. It also is an important success factor in the work environment. Overall, self-regulated learning can be identified as the key competence for performance in and outside of school. To prepare our students for the challenges of tomorrow, the promotion of self-regulated learning should become a central part of everyday schooling. However, as has been shown in several studies for different school levels and confirmed in our own studies for the upper secondary school level, teachers only marginally foster self-regulated learning.

### **3. What can teachers do to help learners to self-regulate their learning?**

Evidence from different studies suggests that self-regulate learning can be fostered successfully. Unfortunately, teachers are led by several misconceptions about the nature of self-regulated learning. Based on theoretical and empirical work, we suggest four important points to take into consideration to successfully foster self-regulated learning in today's classrooms:

The often isolated and sporadic teaching of general learning strategies is only slightly effective. Different strategies, such as motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, should be instructed continuously on a daily basis and should be tied to actual school topics. Teachers should also emphasize the benefit of strategies and explain when, why, and how specific strategies are effective.

Fostering a growth mind-set (abilities are not fixed but malleable) in a classroom helps students to regulate their learning and persist in the face of difficulties. In general, students must be encouraged to become strategic learners.

Self-regulated learning cannot be fostered by just applying student-focused teaching methods such as free choice of work, weekly schedule or project weeks. Learners need to be taught how to self-regulate their own learning and need teacher's support.

Kindergarteners are not too young to learn self-regulation strategies. Already kindergarteners can improve their self-regulated learning compe-

tence through instructions. On the other end of the timeline, it is not evident that adults are experts in self-regulating their learning. Even adults can improve their competence of self-regulated learning.

In summary, the competence of self-regulated learning is crucial for success in school and beyond, and needs to be a key component of today's school curricula. Our research on self-regulated learning spans from kindergarten to university students and focuses on gaining further understanding of student's self-regulated learning processes in different contexts and situations.



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