

# In the Name of God

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**SELF-REGULATED LEARNING AND ITS  
RELATIONSHIP WITH EFL LEARNERS' READING  
STRATEGY USE AND SELF-ASSESSMENT**

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*AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED TO MY  
PARANTS AND  
MY HUSBAND*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SELF-REGULATED LEARNING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH EFL LEARNERS' READING STRATEGY USE AND SELF-ASSESSMENT**

**By**

**FATEMEH ZAREI**

This study investigated self-regulated learning and its relationship with reading strategy use and self-assessment of 107 Iranian EFL university students (56 from Shiraz State University and 51 from Shiraz Payamenour University). Meanwhile, the students of the two universities were compared with regard to their self-regulation, self-assessment and reading strategy used. Correlational and regression analyses were carried out to determine the relationships among the variables and the prediction power of self-regulation with regard to the students' reading strategy use and their self-assessment. Some t-tests were also run to compare the students of the two universities with regard to their reading strategy use, reading comprehension ability, self-assessment and self regulation status. The findings revealed there was no relationship among the three variables. In addition, self-regulation could not predict the students' performance in reading comprehension, reading strategy use or self-assessment. The t-tests showed Payamenour University students were more self-regulated and State university students had higher self-assessments in comparison with their counterparts. It is implied from this study that by understanding more and more about psychological factors in learners, including dimensions of their self-regulation, new ways of effective learning will be found.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

EFL: English as a foreign language

LLS: Language learning strategy

N: Number

RCSs: Reading Comprehension Strategies

RSU: Reading Strategy Use

SRL: Self Regulated Learning

SA: Self Assessment

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.0. Introduction**

This chapter consists of six main sections. The first section is an introductory one and provides preliminaries about the current project. The second section of the chapter presents the general assumptions of the self-regulated learning perspective. The third section provides the framework of this study. Fourthly, the objectives of the study along with the research questions are introduced. In the next section the significance of the study is discussed. Finally, some key terms are defined.

### **1.1. Preliminaries**

#### **1.1.1. Self-Regulated Learning**

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL, hereafter) has emerged as an important new construct in education. As the general picture of schools to date is not a satisfactory one, the concept has been accepted by policy makers, teachers, educators, and parents. By emerging this new construct, lots of debate about school reform appeared world-wide. At present, according to educational psychologists and policy makers' opinion, the key to successful learning in

school and beyond is being able to regulate one's own learning. Policy makers approve and support the basic principles of self-regulated learning and consider school reform as one of their main goals to change the status of the schools. At present, much money is devoted to re-organizing schools. There are many attempts to provide new opportunities for students to learn according to the new learning principles (Boekaerts, 1999). In other words, educational psychologists and policy makers seek self-regulated learners.

Self-regulated learners are those who use their knowledge and beliefs to interpret a given academic task. Such learners set goals and apply skills and strategies for attaining these goals. They monitor their advancement toward the goals by judging performance success in comparison with those goals. Self-regulated learners perceive cues accurately, examine the strategies they have selected based on their achievements, and adjust their activities according to their improvements (Butler & Winne, 1995). At the same time, these learners are aware of what they know, believe, and feel toward the specific task, and are able to sustain motivation despite the obstacles they may encounter. While they are involved in the specific experience, they develop affects associated with judgments, and they revise their knowledge and beliefs about their competence. So, it seems that self-regulated learners manage the interplay between the cognitive and affective aspects of their behavior when they are engaged with the task (Butler & Winne, 1995).

Considering the cognitive and affective aspects of the behavior, social cognitive view of self-regulation expresses the view that self-regulated learning consists of interactions between the personal characteristics of the learner, his behavior, and the contextual environment. These three factors are mediated by the learner's knowledge and sense of self-efficacy (Jakubowski & Dembo, 2002). Schunk (2001) notes that, from the social cognitive point of view learners in some sense may or may not be self-regulated learners. It may

depend on the environment or context in which they find themselves. Therefore, self-regulated learning may take place or it may not, with the environment in which students are. Students may selectively engage in behaviors that enhance learning based on the value they can see in them. This is in addition to the responses that are strengthened based on environmental consequences, since much learning takes place outside the realm of overt behavior and physical consequence. Schunk (2001) also notes that the social cognitive perspective of SRL also puts emphasis on the modeling of behaviors and how modeling by others can be internalized by students for use in their learning. Of course, modeling of ineffective learning styles, beliefs, or social practices can also develop barriers to learning in the college environment.

Some researchers have pointed out that SRL theory must also take into account the volitional or the willful aspects of self-regulation. As pointed out above by Schunk (2001), SRL may or may not be 'turned on' depending on the context. SRL theory must also consider the fact that the student volition, or willpower, is what needs to be considered for self-regulation to take place in the first place, and this volitional ability differs among students. This fact puts SRL as separate from the particular student's cognitive capability or talents. Research in this area has focused on control of one's volition across a spectrum of control of one's cognition, emotion and motivation, as well as control of one's task situation and even other's in a group situation. No matter what our intellectual ability is, it seems that our personal will to learn, or simply control our progress or our influence over ourselves, or our environment must be in operation for any learning to take place or improve (Corno, 2001). Therefore, to learn materials one's talent is not as important as his will. If one wants to learn something, he should have the will to learn and be able to regulate his learning process. Based on these facts it can be claimed that a willing self-regulated learner is definitely successful in his learning.

Investigating Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) as a new construct, a question arises and that is "What does SRL encompass?" There is an agreement on what exactly SRL encompasses, which is "the degree that students are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001, p. 5). Self-regulated learners actively generate thoughts, feelings and actions to attain their learning goals. Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) identified at least seven different theoretical views on SRL, each having their own assertions on issues like key processes, environmental conditions and acquired capacities. These views are as follows:

- Operant: stressing self-instruction, modeling, and shaping of behavior; emphasizing provision of relevant stimuli for learning.
- Phenomenological: stressing self-worth, subjective experiences, and development of a self-system; emphasizing personal identity.
- Information Processing: stressing transformation of information, and self-monitoring with relatively little attention to environmental conditions.
- Social Cognitive: stressing self-observation and enactive experiences, through social learning; emphasizing self-efficacy in learning.
- Volitional: stressing controlled actions to regulate emotions and environmental conditions.
- Vygotskian: stressing inner speech, dialogue, and mediation acquired through a hierarchy of developmental levels.
- Constructivist: stressing personal theories, discovery learning, and development of self-regulatory processes, based on conceptual change.

Boekaerts (1999) asserts that understanding of self-regulated learning has been informed by three schools of thought: (1) research on learning styles, (2) research on metacognition and regulation styles, and (3) theories of the self, including goal-directed behavior. Based on these schools of thought, a three-



layer model was presented. The innermost layer pertained to regulation of the processing modes. The middle layer represented regulation of the learning process. The outermost layer concerns regulation of the self. Educators and researchers would benefit from an integration of these three frames of reference into a comprehensive model of self-regulated learning.

In an attempt to help both students and teachers to change their traditional roles in the classroom, educational psychologists have engaged in two types of projects. The first type of project can be condensed to "understanding the dynamics of self-regulated learning". The second type can be summarized as "understanding the dynamics of powerful learning environments as a way to promote self-regulation in the classroom. Boekaerts (2002) attempted to establish the centrality of self-regulation as a theoretical assumption and a fundamental psychological construct. He argued that most current psychological models of self-regulation and by implication the innovation programs that were based on these models, were not well focused, were incomplete, and harbor many misconceptions. He also argued that educational psychologists needed to broaden the way they conceptualize the dynamics of learning contexts and found new ways to study the integrated processes that make up self-regulation in the context of the classroom. His main message was that students bring their own goals to the classroom and that these goals were the key to their adaptation system. These personal goals gave meaning and organization to a student's adaptation processes in the classroom. Some of his comments were critical, but he did not intend to discredit the important work that had been done in this area. Rather, he wanted to argue that educational psychologists need to broaden the way they conceptualize the dynamics of learning contexts and find new ways to study the integrated processes that make up self-regulation in the context of the classroom.

### **1.1.2. Self-Regulated Learning and Reading Strategies**

Among the language learning skills, reading is a very important skill in learning a foreign language and reading comprehension is claimed to be the main purpose of foreign language teaching in Iran. But acquiring and mastering this skill seems complex and difficult to many learners and they often find it hard to use such a skill in their learning experience (Ghonsooly, & Eghtesadee, 2006). On the other hand, the findings of many ESL/EFL research projects have shown the positive effect of learning strategy on enhancing reading comprehension of learners.

Skillful readers continuously adjust their reading behaviors to accommodate text difficulty, task demands, and other contextual variables. They monitor their reading process carefully and take immediate steps when encountering comprehension problems. Being aware of their own cognitive and linguistic resources, they are capable of directing their attention to the appropriate clues in anticipating, organizing and retaining text information. These and similar behaviors, separating skilled from less-skilled readers, essentially characterize what is referred to as strategic reading (Koda, 2005).

A major question is that why should we be concerned with reading strategies? Paris et al. (1991 cited in Koda, 2005, p. 206) suggested six reasons why strategic reading is critical in school learning:

1. Strategies allow readers to elaborate, organize, and evaluate information derived from text.
2. The acquisition of reading strategies coincides and overlaps with the development of multiple cognitive strategies to enhance attention, memory, communication, and all learning.
3. Strategies are personal cognitive tools that can be used selectively

and flexibly.

4. Strategic reading reflects metacognition and motivation because readers need to have both the knowledge and disposition to use strategies.

5. Strategies that foster reading and thinking can be taught directly by teachers.

6. Strategic reading can enhance learning throughout the curriculum.

As mentioned before, to be a successful learner at the university level requires reading and learning from challenging academic texts. To improve learners' cognitive or metacognitive capacities, many approaches and tools have been applied in classrooms in the field of reading. Among them, reading strategies are frequently found not only to facilitate reading comprehension but also to improve reading achievement. Strategic reading is an important type of strategic behavior, which is necessary for being a successful learner. Paris et al. (1996) describe reading strategies as "tactics that readers use to comprehend a text" (p. 610). Readers actively construct meaning while reading by using different strategies such as identifying main ideas, integrating information across text, connecting textual information with previous knowledge and generating inferences. Kozminsky & Kozminsky (2001) found that readers who use reading strategies appropriately and who know that they use these strategies more frequently understand texts better and have higher academic achievement. Reading strategies are particularly important for text comprehension when familiarity with the text is low.

Within the scope of language learning strategies, reading comprehension strategies have been paid so much attention. In a causal model of factors affecting reading comprehension performance of EFL learners (Mehrpoor, 2004), strategies were found to be one of the main factors that affects reading comprehension of readers of English as a foreign language. But the point is

that many individual differences can influence the use of learning strategies.

Researchers investigating language learning strategies have found that various factors can affect strategy choice by learners. Oxford (1989) mentions some of these factors including the language being learned, the learning goals, the level of learning (or the proficiency of learners), the learner's self-awareness, age and sex. Moreover, she maintains that affective variables such as attitudes, motivational level, motivational orientation, personality factors and learning experiences also play a role in the strategy use. Wharton (2000) also refers to proficiency level, cultural background, first and other languages learnt, motivation, foreign language versus second language settings, gender and language learning styles as factors affecting the types, numbers and frequency of use of language learning strategies (as cited in Ghonsooly, and Eghtesadee, 2006).

Ellis (1994) in reviewing the factors that have been found to affect strategy choice refers to learner beliefs about language learning, age, strength of motivation, the type of motivation and goals, learner's personal background, language being learnt, setting and the task. One factor which has rarely been investigated and little research has been done to investigate its role in learning strategy choice is the psychological factor which is called self-regulated learning.

Over the last two decades, there has been a shift in the way teachers and researchers write about student learning in higher education. Instead of characterizing it as a simple acquisition process based on teacher transmission, learning is now more commonly conceptualized as a process whereby students actively construct their own knowledge and skills (Barr and Tagg, 1995; De Corte, 1996; Nicol, 1997). (As cited in Nicol, & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Recently, it has become clear that one of the central issues of self-regulated learning is students' ability to select, combine, and coordinate