Chapter 61
Understanding Self-Regulated Learning and Its Importance in Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

With the rise in online course offerings, coupled with the growth in online course enrollment, it is surprising that drop-out rates among online courses are higher than in face-to-face courses. This has placed an importance on understanding what contributes to successful learning in online courses and how to address student needs to increase student success. Theories and conceptual models supported by research have explained the complexity of self-regulated learning and the important role metacognition and motivation play in the processes within self-regulated learning. Researchers continue to explore the interconnected relationship within the multiple constructs of self-regulated learning and academic success and its importance in online learning. It is important that instructors have an understanding of the many areas that influence student learning. Through a holistic approach addressing individual difference in supporting students' needs, instructors can encourage the development of self-regulated learning skills through scaffolding different experiences involving instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are experiencing tremendous growth in online course offerings in recent decades. Students participating in at least one online course increased from 1.6 million in 2002 to 6 million in 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2017), and many experts predict that matriculation in traditional classrooms will continue to lag behind online enrollment (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). Due to this explosive growth, practitioners and researchers are increasingly interested in what factors contribute to successful online learning. There are many challenges with the autonomous nature of online courses, including attrition rates that can be twice as high as face-to-face settings (Levy, 2007). Due to its well documented positive relationship with academic success (Barnard-Brak, Lan & Paton, 2010; Bail, Zhang & Tachiyama, 2008), one area of scholarly interest is in self-regulation in online courses (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004; Green & Azevedo, 2007). Lee and Choi (2011) identify an important reason for dropout rates in online courses. They suggest that students lack the capacity to self-regulate and note that students often fail to recognize the effort and organization required to succeed. Cho and Shen (2013) also recognize limited self-regulatory skills as a contributing factor to attrition rates of online courses.

Self-regulated learning is a complex concept that was born out of multiple theoretical areas of study, especially the study of metacognition and social cognitive theory. Though the core concept of self-regulated learning has remained the same, the structure or functional description has evolved over the years through various insights from different theorists and areas of research. Understanding the complexity that makes up self-regulated learning as it is studied today is essential to the application of strategies that support self-regulated learning. It has been suggested that training on self-regulated learning theory and models would best serve teachers in maximizing student's learning potential (Panadero, 2017). With this in mind, and due to the complexity of self-regulated learning, this chapter begins with a historical look at the development and evolution of self-regulated learning theory, including important models that contribute to its current-day understanding. To promote a comprehensive understanding of self-regulated learning, information on the essential role of metacognition and motivation in this construct is presented. Additionally, the crucial relationship between self-regulated learning and academic achievement is considered, along with the individual differences in student self-regulated learning skill level. Finally, instructors are encouraged to become aware of the various self-regulatory challenges faced by students and respond with a variety of appropriate self-regulated learning strategies shown to correlate with academic success in online courses.

DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF SELF-REGULATED LEARNING THEORY

Decades of research have led researchers to develop the construct of self-regulated learning. While self-regulated learning has been a topic of many articles and experimental studies, the debate continues as to what truly defines self-regulated learning. In exploring the literature on this topic, it is quite clear that there are some common core elements that transcend the various perspectives which adds to the complexity of this construct. Self-regulated learning, as it is known today in the mainstream literature, was born out of theoretical literature attempting to describe various constructs such as metacognition and the self-regulation of behavior and emotion. For instance, elements of self-regulated learning can be found in the early writings on metacognition by Flavell in the 1970s. Baker and Brown (1984) further