Chapter 13
Reimagining Instructional Design for Blended Learning in Chinese Higher Education: A Self-Regulated Learning Perspective

Jingran Yang
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3732-7706
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Wan Ahmad Jaafar Wan Yahaya
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8605-0062
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Blended learning has rapidly expanded in Chinese higher education. Nevertheless, existing instructional designs do not fully exploit the potential of self-regulated learning (SRL), thereby constraining learner autonomy and limiting learning depth. This study reviews an SRL-driven framework for blended instruction that is tailored to the Chinese higher education context and aims to cultivate students' self-directed learning competence. Grounded in Zimmerman's SRL model and informed by empirical evidence and institutional case analyses. By integrating technological tools, cultural adaptation, and social interaction strategies, the framework seeks to bridge the gap between technological adoption and deep cognitive engagement, thus providing theoretical direction and practical guidance for instructional designers,

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educators, and policymakers. Findings demonstrate that the systematic incorporation of SRL strategies into blended environments markedly enhances students' learning performance and self-regulatory skills.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the modernization and digital transformation of higher education in China have accelerated rapidly, making blended learning (BL) a central strategy for pedagogical innovation and reform (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2024; Lim &Wang, 2016). National policy initiatives, such as China Education Modernization 2035 and the Plan for Building China into an Educational Powerhouse (2024–2035), have prioritized the integration of technology and student-centered approaches, with an explicit focus on cultivating learner autonomy and innovation.

Within this evolving landscape, self-regulated learning (SRL) theory, originally developed by Zimmerman and further enriched by subsequent scholars, has emerged as a key framework for understanding and enhancing student agency, metacognitive skills, and lifelong learning abilities (Zimmerman, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2011). Blended learning environments, by nature, offer increased flexibility, access to digital resources, and opportunities for personalized learning pathways (Wang, Han, & Yang, 2015). However, the successful realization of these advantages largely depends on the extent to which students are able to exercise self-regulation in their learning processes (Zimmerman, 2002; Broadbent & Poon, 2015). Research has shown that well-designed instructional frameworks and technological support can significantly promote SRL and improve academic outcomes (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). However, the practical integration of SRL strategies into blended instruction remains uneven across Chinese universities. Many current designs continue to rely on traditional teacher-centered paradigms, and formative assessment, peer collaboration, and digital scaffolding are often underutilized.

These challenges are further compounded by deep-rooted cultural traditions that emphasize teacher authority and examination-oriented learning, which can inhibit the development of student autonomy and adaptive learning strategies (Barnard-Brak, Lan, & Paton, 2010). Addressing these complex issues requires a localized, context-sensitive approach that not only draws on international models but also responds to the distinctive characteristics of Chinese higher education (Lim & Wang, 2016).