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The Significance of Self-Regulated Learning in English Language Online Writing Classes

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Abstract

Over the past decade, online learning has gained much popularity in EFL learning. However, the effectiveness and validity of online EFL learning has been subject to many discussions. Most scholars attempted to assess student perceptions of online learning. This study presents a case study of one participant in an online EFL writing course at a private university in Uzbekistan. Based on the activity theory as a framework, this study seeks to explore what makes a successful learner in an online environment and how self-regulation impact student performance and learning achievement in the online learning context. Data

collected from lesson observation and interview suggest that learners who use good self-regulation strategies and tend to benefit more from online learning experience, whilst students who do not employ this strategy and are only motivated to fulfill a degree requirement are more likely to be frustrated. The results also show that physical distance could be an obstacle who do not get assistance from instructors or peers. Precisely, learners need guidance and support how to motivate and guide yourself in an online environment.

Keywords: Self-Regulation, Motive, Strategic Learner

1. Introduction

A popular substitute for conventional face-to-face teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classrooms is computer technology. Computer writing, the usage of hypermedia resources (a combination of visuals, sound, and characters), and both synchronous (like online group discussions) and asynchronous (like emails and bulletin boards) computer-mediated communication have all been investigated (CMC) Research on the advantages of computers usage in computer-mediated writing classes has produced controversial findings (1, p. 58). Based on reports, CMC promotes cooperative learning, facilitates communication, lowers anxiety, and establishes equitable class structures (2, p. 495); (3, p. 9); (4, p. 70); (5, p. 865). However, some research (6, p. 50); (7, p. 280) have suggested that CMC might not result in better writing. When it comes to how students view CMC, the picture is a more nuanced combination of happiness and dissatisfaction (8, p. 40); (9, p. 230).

2. Literature review

2.1 Self-regulated learning

Self-regulation, according to Zimmerman, is "self-generated ideas, attitudes, and actions that are planned and cyclically tailored to the achievement of personal goals" (10, p. 14). In the academic setting, it requires time management, attention to education, practice, coding, and information organization, as well as creating productive work environments and making good use of social resources (11, p. 26). Additionally, Pintrich (12, p. 50) said that academically, it has self-directed processes that call for students to keep an eye on, take charge of, and assess their outcomes—including cognition, conduct, and specific environmental factors. Additionally, personal, behavioral, and environmental processes are interconnected and necessary for self-regulation (13, p. 45). Additionally, several psychological elements are needed for self-regulation, such as motivation, tactics, self-awareness of performance results, and sensitivity to environmental and social contexts (14, p. 33). Depending on the definitions, self-regulated learning encourages students to establish their own objectives and choose the plans and strategies that should be employed to achieve those objectives, which raises their self-awareness of their performance, makes them monitor their learning process, and makes them control the social and physical environment (15, p. 175). Bandura (13) and Zimmerman (10) identified three key processes or phases that make up being self-regulated. In order to self-regulate one's own learning process, according to Bandura, self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction are crucial. Self-observation is the attentive monitoring of one's own behavior, self-judgment is comparing one's own performance to that of a standard, and

self-reaction is an evaluative response to self-judgment (13). Similar to this, Zimmerman (10) asserted that self-regulation occurs in three cyclical periods that each have three components: the forethought, performance, and self-reflection phases. The forethought phase is characterized by processes and beliefs like motivation, self-efficacy, goal-setting, and planning; the performance phase is characterized by processes like attentional control, keeping track of progress, and monitoring; the self-reflection phase is characterized by processes like self-evaluation; this is where learners compare their performance to a goal and assess their results (10). Zimmerman (16); (17) takes into account a few inquiries to better grasp these phases. In the planning stage, students might consider how they will begin, where and when they will write, and what will motivate them. They can try to find answers to whether they achieved the assignment's goal, why it is taking longer than expected, whether they can be motivated to keep going, and what will aid them throughout the performance phase. Questions such as "did the students do a good job, how they stayed on task, what helped them, did they give enough time to complete the assignment, did they choose the best study strategies, did they set rewards and consequences for themselves, and did the students follow their plans" are asked in the self-reflection face.

Using Zimmerman's cycle model for self-regulated learning as a guide, Hirata (18) identified four self-regulated learning components: cognitive/metacognitive, affective, behavioral, and environmental controls. Hirata claims that perceptions of prior experience, goal setting, and strategic planning in the forethought phase, strategies implementation, monitoring, and controlling progress in the performance phase, performance evaluation, and strategic adoption in the self-reflection phase are all examples of cognitive and metacognitive regulation. Affective regulation is connected to motivational beliefs, perceptions of potential outcomes in the planning phase, and affective reactions in the self-reflection phase. It also requires monitoring and controlling motivation and mood throughout performance (18). According to Hirata, the stages of behavioral regulation include planning for behavioral engagement in the forethought phase, carrying out and managing planned commitments, observing behavioral changes in the performance phase, behavioral adaptation, and defensive responses in the self-reflection phase. Hirata claims that the processes of resource management, problem identification, assistance seeking, problem solving, environmental restructuring, and disengagement are all parts of environmental regulation. These processes take place in the forethought and performance phases as well as the self-reflection and restructuring phases (18).

The research on technology-integrated learning has mostly discussed using computers as an addition to classroom-based writing courses. Only a few research have examined a writing context that is totally online. Online education, commonly known as distance learning, is a significant and popular mode of computer-mediated learning. It is entirely conducted on computers by employing a variety of technologies such as email, word processing applications, online chat rooms, websites and other Internet resources. In higher education, online language classes have been widely accepted because they provide more learners with access to information by removing limits associated with time or location. A fully online course, however, consists of much

more than a collection of synchronous and asynchronous CMC activities. Students must create new learning strategies, negotiate new relationships and meanings, and finish academic work utilizing computers in the new setting. When faced with the difficulties of a new learning environment, some students find ways to adjust and accept these changes in order to fully benefit from the new learning paradigm; yet, some students struggle with the paradigm shift and do not gain anything from it. Investigating what makes a strategic learner in online learning is essential from a pedagogical perspective so that instruction may be changed to help every student make the transition to online learning more easily.

In this paper, I present a case study of one learner who was enrolled in an entirely online EFL writing course offered by a foreign languages department of a private university. According to deep analysis of the data, I was able to find out students' motives, perceptions, and selective use or non-use of learning strategies in the online course. Particularly, I attempted to seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What self-regulation strategies do learners use in an online EFL writing class?
2. How does self-regulated learning impact learner performance and learning achievement in an online EFL writing class?

3. Methodology

The EFL academic writing course is mandatory for all undergraduate students to help improve their ability to read and write academic discourse. The course is based on a process-based approach, which is designed to enhance academic reading and writing abilities. Apart from explaining the types of writing techniques, the course provides students with opportunities to conduct academic research and write analytical and argumentative essays. The class had 20 (14 males and 6 females) Uzbek students. All are first-year students. Kamilla (pseudonym) was the instructor of the course. All materials used in the course were uploaded to the course platform. The majority of the course materials were composed of digitalized writing-related content, thorough guidelines and rubrics for writing assignments, discussion themes, and further readings. Every week, students had to finish two writing projects on average. Regarding reading materials and writing assignments, I corresponded with students via email. She also conducted one-on-one writing conferences using Instant Messenger, a for-profit synchronous online chat tool. The students were expected to post on the asynchronous discussion board about once a week to report how well they understood the reading assignments and how they were doing with their writing assignments in order to promote collaborative learning. They also had synchronous group discussions in the chat room provided by the course website throughout the semester. Essays were reviewed by their peers through email, with me, the course instructor, selecting the groups.

4. Data analysis

The data mainly came from interviews in which they reflected upon their experiences in the ESL online writing course. During his interview, Aziz (chosen name) explained how he managed routine course work including reading and writing tasks. Aziz managed to evaluate the given tasks and use effective strategies in doing the tasks. His writing

approaches were conducive to the writing process taught in the course. Importantly, he had clear vision of his own strengths and weaknesses, and was able to get assistance from the instructor when needed. He says:

“First, I read the assignment. If I understand how to do it, then I’ll make some time to do the task. If I don’t understand, I write to my instructor asking his help to explain the task one more time. Then, I spent at least one hour to work on the task like, you know, thinking, brainstorming, drafting, modifying and such kind of things take time. So, I try to spent one hour to finish my task on time and in good quality. Usually, it takes me one week to finish the assignments, of course, it depends on the types of the tasks, too. Because, the topics and requirements of some tasks require efforts and time”.

Particularly, Aziz found that writing on a computer was a pleasurable experience that he was keen to embrace. He was not distracted by the computer's entertainment and communication features like many students are. He acknowledged the importance of computers in education and the fact that he had to use a computer to complete assignments in other regular courses as well. Aziz was conscious of the need to adjust to the new way of learning through self-regulation as a student who was eager to embrace the future. He responded to a question regarding potential diversions from computer use by saying:

“It frequently takes place. For example, while writing a paper, they log into Facebook, check their mail, and such kind of stuff they do. That distracts a lot. But students still have to use the computer to type in a normal course”.

5. Conclusion

This small-scale case study sought to investigate what makes a successful and strategic learner in an online EFL writing course and how self-regulation influence student performance and academic achievement in online learning. The study showed that those who have a strong motive to learn and effective self-regulation skills are likely to be encouraged by computer technology and they can benefit enough even they are learning online, while those who are solely externally motivated and have difficulties with self-regulation tend to be more frustrated. Interpreting the data gathered from interview with Aziz, I found out that he was internally motivated to take this course as he truly enjoyed writing in English. All of his actions proved to be meaningful and integrative steps towards his goal of becoming a successful student writer and a capable online learner at his university. It is evident that his full engagement in online learning activities resulted from thoughtful planning, organization, and self-discipline, which supported successful learning outcomes.

6. References

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