

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN LEARNERS' SELF-REGULATED LEARNING, SELF-DETERMINED MOTIVATION, AND ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE: A REVIEW OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

Self-determined motivation, self-regulated learning, and academic persistence are recognized as pivotal non-cognitive factors shaping students' academic advancement (Watts-Martinez, 2015). The increasing public interest in higher education outcomes propels researchers to explore the factors contributing to persistence and successful college completion. Motivation could act as an intermediary element connecting self-regulated learning and academic persistence. Despite their significance, the interrelation between these factors, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language, has not yet been thoroughly examined. This review delves into the theoretical foundations of this interrelation, shedding light on its importance and potential impacts, especially in non-English-speaking contexts such as Iran. The existing literature indicates the importance of recognizing how orientations of self-determined motivation, be it intrinsic or extrinsic, impact the academic persistence of EFL students. This becomes particularly significant in the context of English language education, especially at the tertiary level, calling for additional scrutiny.

Keywords: Academic Persistence, EFL Learning, Self-Determined Motivation, Self-Regulated Learning, Tertiary Education

INTRODUCTION

Empirical investigations have unveiled numerous variables linked to persistence, prompting the formulation of causal models and theories. Academic institutions frequently refer to this corpus of knowledge to shape their student engagement strategies (Davidson et al., 2009). In delving into the persistence of students and its associated factors, an initial clarification of the term is essential. As defined by Leppel (2001), student persistence within higher education refers to individuals' experiences as they strive towards academic goals. Recognizing the inherent connection between goal pursuit and motivation, various motivating factors contribute to the pursuit of a unique academic goal. It can be hypothesized that a relationship exists between motivation and student persistence—an inquiry explored by researchers like Weiner (1965). Moreover, inquiries have examined the relationship

between self-regulated learning and academic persistence, as demonstrated by Zimmerman (1990), along with the association between self-regulated learning and self-determined motivation, as investigated by Boekaerts (1996) and Zumbrunn et al. (2011).

Notably, a motivation construct rooted in a self-regulated learning framework for the examination of second language learning is noticeably lacking. In the upcoming sections, we will delve into key literature and theoretical frameworks concerning self-regulated learning, self-determination theory, and academic persistence. Subsequently, we will draw deductions and propose recommendations tailored to the context of Iranian tertiary education.

Self-Regulated Learning

Exploring the nuanced dimensions of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), it is imperative to delve into its definition, components, benefits, and challenges, emphasizing its pivotal role in academic success and personal development.

During the 1980s, the term "Self-Regulated Learning" emerged, gaining prominence due to an increased focus on self-regulation in academic settings (Dinsmore et al., 2008). From the mid-1980s onward, researchers have extensively explored how students can become masters of their own learning processes, leading to the establishment of a substantial body of literature on self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). According to Zumbrunn et al. (2011), self-regulated learning (SRL) can be the decisive factor between academic success and failure for many students. Pintrich (2000) described SRL as: "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (p. 453).

Current models of self-regulated learning frequently incorporate metacognition and self-regulation, with a focus on self-monitoring (Dinsmore et al., 2008). Zimmerman and Schunk (2001; 2008) specifically link motivation to self-regulation, characterizing self-regulated students as those who are actively engaged in metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects of their learning processes to attain their objectives.

In Pintrich's (1999) study, the framework suggests that SRL can be facilitated by adopting mastery and relative ability goals and hindered by adopting extrinsic goals. Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) scrutinized the construct of motivation in relation to SRL asserting that each concept reinforces the other. They define self-regulation as controlling one's conduct to achieve a goal, highlighting that students' employing self-regulation tend to establish better goals, use more learning strategies, and exhibit increased effort and persistence.

Self-regulation, signifying the autonomous management of one's actions and decisions without external influence or assistance, forms the cornerstone of SRL. In academic contexts, particularly within universities or classrooms, SRL extends to encompass general models of regulation applied to cognition, motivation, behavior, and context. SRL embodies a guided learning process, emphasizing planning, monitoring, and evaluating personal progress against established standards, all fueled by intrinsic motivation (Zumbrunn et al., 2011). The pivotal role of self-regulated learning in distinguishing academic success from failure is

underscored by Zumbrunn et al. (2011). Those who incorporate SRL practices not only witness improvements in academic performance but also carry forward effective learning skills into higher education and professional settings. Especially beneficial for students tackling unfamiliar topics, those academically underprepared, or individuals encountering setbacks and demotivation (Kirk, 2017), SRL is identified as a suitable approach. Recognizing the distinctive challenges associated with acquiring a foreign language, employing self-regulated learning appears as a suitable strategy, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Ultimately, students stand to gain valuable insights into their strengths and weaknesses, along with adept time and learning strategy management, contributing significantly to their personal development (Zimmerman, 2002). Acknowledged as a crucial predictor of academic motivation and achievement, SRL requires students to independently plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning progress (Zumbrunn et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize that only a limited number of students naturally excel at these self-regulatory processes (Zumbrunn, 2011).

Self-regulated second language learning involves an autonomous framework where learners independently oversee and regulate their language learning journey. This process involves learners personally activating, directing, and sustaining behaviors, cognitions, emotions, and motivation systematically directed toward achieving their learning goals. The essence of self-regulation lies in the ability to develop, implement, and flexibly maintain planned behavior to attain one's goals. Drawing upon Kanfer's (1970) foundational work, Miller and Brown (1991) crafted a seven-step model of self-regulation. In this model, behavioral self-regulation may encounter challenges due to failure or deficits at any of the seven steps.

The capability for SRL can determine the academic trajectory of numerous students (Zumbrunn et al., 2011). The essence of SRL proves integral to the educational journey (Järvelä & Järvenoja, 2011; Zimmerman, 2008), fostering the cultivation of effective learning routines and the enhancement of study skills (Wolters, 2011). Additionally, it empowers students to employ learning strategies that contribute to elevated academic achievements (Harris et al., 2005), actively monitor their performance (Harris et al., 2005), and assess their academic advancements (de Bruin et al., 2011).

Educators need to acquaint themselves with the elements shaping a learner's capacity for self-regulation and the methodologies to recognize and encourage self-regulated learning (SRL) within their classrooms. Motivation, alongside self-regulation, plays a pivotal role in determining students' academic achievements (Zimmerman, 2008), with SRL becoming notably more formidable in the absence of adequate motivation. Self-regulated learning encompasses how students approach their learning processes, strive toward objectives, and assess their performance, integrating cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and motivational beliefs (VanderStoep et al., 1996).

The Cycle of Self-Regulated Learning

SRL constitutes a cyclical process where students partake in planning, performance monitoring, and reflecting on outcomes. This iterative cycle entails students planning for a task, monitoring their performance, and subsequently reflecting on the outcome.

Subsequently, the student utilizes this reflection to make adjustments and prepare for the next task. It is essential to acknowledge that this process is not universally applicable; instead, it should be customized to suit individual students and the particular learning tasks at hand (Zimmerman, 2002).

Further deconstructing the process, its cyclical nature comprises specific phases: Forethought and planning, performance monitoring, and reflections on performance (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000). This emphasizes the dynamic and adaptive nature of self-regulated learning, highlighting its effectiveness when tailored to the unique needs of learners and specific academic challenges.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) represents a macro perspective on human motivation and personality, delving into innate growth tendencies and fundamental psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It focuses on the motivation driving individuals' choices, free from external influence and interference, while also advocating for the support of natural or intrinsic tendencies towards effective behavior. Widely studied and applied globally, SDT has been a focal point for researchers, Ryan and Deci (2000), affiliated with the University of Rochester, emerging as prominent figures in this field. Cherry's (2022) study further substantiates the principles of self-determination theory. According to SDT, individuals are motivated by innate psychological needs, with three key dimensions considered both inherent and universal: the need for competence, connectedness, and autonomy. Intrinsic motivation, characterized by engaging in activities for their inherent value, assumes a pivotal role within the framework of SDT. According to Zimmerman (2004), self-motivation emerges in the absence of external rewards or incentives, serving as a strong indicator of a learner's growing autonomy. This underlines the learner's ability to internally drive and sustain their motivation, independent of external inducements.

Referring to the available literature, several studies have delved into the connection between self-regulated learning and self-determined motivation, as evidenced by the works of researchers like Mezei (2008) and Hrbackova and Suchankova (2016). These findings will be comprehensively examined and discussed in the upcoming literature review.

In the analysis of students' determination within higher education settings, it is essential to take into account the perspective of SDT in understanding human motivation, as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1995).

The Nature of Motivation

Motivation is a term frequently employed by both teachers and learners when discussing the success or failure of language learning. Considerable research, particularly highlighted by Dörnyei (1998), has focused on the crucial role of motivation in the context of second language learning. Recognized as a crucial and fundamental construct, motivation serves as a catalyst, propelling language learners toward self-regulated learning. Over the long term, motivation empowers learners to assume control of their language acquisition, fostering proficiency in becoming adept self-regulated second language learners. Motivation precedes self-regulated learning, as demonstrated by Banisaeid and Huang (2015) in their

investigation of the connection between motivation, self-regulated learning, and language learning. The study reveals a substantial relationship among motivation, self-regulation, and language learning strategies, with identified regulation emerging as the predominant motivational orientation. Notably, participants predominantly employed effort regulation as a key self-regulated learning strategy. Often, there is an assumption that we grasp the full scope of what the term encompasses (Dörnyei, 1998). Motivation encompasses various dimensions, including energy, direction, persistence, and consistency—all of which are integral to activation and intention. Within the field of psychology, motivation has consistently held a central and enduring position. It lies at the heart of biological, cognitive, and social regulation (Ryan et al, 2000). Understanding the multifaceted nature of motivation is crucial for comprehending its profound impact on the processes and outcomes of language learning.

Intrinsic Motivation

In the realm of education, the concept of intrinsic motivation refers to students who are self-driven, demonstrating actions characterized by self-determination. This concept delves into the internal factors influencing their inclination and choices to participate in academic activities. Furthermore, these internal motivators guide students to navigate the learning environment based on their individual value system. Internal motivating factors may include behaviors fueled by a genuine interest in learning and an inherent attraction to its intrinsic value (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Extrinsic Motivation

The concept of extrinsic motivation is similarly associated with students' self-determination, emphasizing external factors that drive their engagement in the academic realm. Extrinsic motivators stem from influences outside the students' internal value system. An illustration of an extrinsic motivator is evident when students study for their courses to gain approval from their instructors or attain high grades (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Herzberg, 1987). In certain instances, students' actions may be prompted by the fear of adverse consequences, such as course failure (Deci & Ryan, 1995), and the pursuit of success within the academic environment.

On the whole, intrinsic motivation is characterized by individuals' innate desire to learn for the sake of learning itself (Covington & Mueller, 2001). When students find enjoyment in acquiring new information, their interest in learning is considered intrinsic or internal motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1995a/2000a). Conversely, extrinsic motivation comes into play when individuals participate in an activity influenced by external factors (Deci & Ryan, 2000b).

Self-Determined motivation

Researchers argue that students' self-determination is a crucial aspect of their emotional intelligence (Legault, 2017). It acts as an empowering force, directing individuals' thoughts and actions toward particular objectives (Acat & Dereli, 2012). Deci and Ryan's (2000a) Self-Determination Theory offers a model for examining intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation, frequently using the terms self-determination, motivation, and self-determined motivation interchangeably. This framework emphasizes students' psychological need to experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between self-regulated learning and self-determined motivation, showcasing a positive connection. Ongoing research continues to delve into these issues and their interplay.

Self-Determination Theory: A Closer Look

The intrinsic motivation concept, characterized by doing things purely for their own sake, holds a significant role in SDT (Cherry, 2022). Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000) formulated a motivation theory suggesting that individuals are driven by a fundamental need for growth and fulfillment. SDT posits that people are inherently directed toward activities that foster personal development, encompassing the mastery of challenges and the acquisition of new experiences, vital for constructing a coherent self. While external rewards such as money or prizes can drive actions (referred to as extrinsic motivation), SDT emphasizes internal motivators, like the pursuit of knowledge or independence (referred to as intrinsic motivation).

Learners demonstrate self-motivation when they autonomously utilize strategies to progress toward a learning objective. This element is essential to the self-regulation process, requiring learners to assume control of their learning (Corno, 1993).

Moreover, self-motivation, occurring independently of external rewards or incentives, serves as a robust indicator of a learner's increasing autonomy (Zimmerman, 2004). Students who establish their own learning objectives and find motivation internally to advance are inclined to persist through challenging tasks, making the learning process more gratifying (Wolters, 2003). Research influenced by SDT has consistently focused on these precise issues (Deci & Ryan, 1995). This emphasis on intrinsic motivation sheds light on the learner's inherent drive for growth and personal fulfillment.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), individuals require competence, connection or relatedness and autonomy to achieve psychological growth. Individuals who feel competent, connected, and autonomous tend to be self-determined and intrinsically motivated in pursuing their interests. However, despite the common need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in educational settings, students driven primarily by external factors may view their academic tasks as less enjoyable and interesting than those motivated internally (Wild et al., 1997).

Academic Persistence

The topic of college student persistence has garnered significant attention in research over the past two decades, primarily focusing on students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. Empirical studies have pinpointed numerous variables linked to persistence, resulting in the development of causal models and the formulation of various theories. Institutions are increasingly turning to this body of literature to inform and enhance their retention efforts (Davidson et al., 2009).

The drive to persist and thrive within the campus environment is a fundamental factor for all students (Rendón et al., 2000). Attitudes toward persistence are characterized by students' sentiments regarding their commitment to stay and advance through higher levels at their institutions (Castillo et al., 2006). Students' engagements with educators, families, and community members mold their perceptions of the institutional learning culture, impacting their achievements and motivation to pursue advanced education (Harber et al., 2012).

The term “student persistence” constitutes individuals’ journeys toward achieving an academic goal (Leppel, 2001), and it involves an institution's efforts to support students in progressing toward degree completion (Seppanen, 2007). Peart-Forbes (2004) and Saweczko (2008) make a distinction between student persistence and retention, emphasizing that persistence is focused on students’ advancement toward degree completion, whereas retention is institutionally oriented, involving actions by decision-makers and administrators to retain students from one semester or year to the next.

Although retention ultimately leads to persistence, their focal points differ, with persistence being student-centered and retention institutionally oriented. The current literature indicates that models like the Student Integration Model and the Student Attrition Model offer valuable insights into the persistence process. This study seeks to investigate the potential integration of these models by simultaneously examining non-overlapping propositions, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the factors influencing students' decisions to stay in college.

Colleges and universities actively consult this body of literature to inform their retention strategies based on empirical investigations that identify variables linked to persistence (Davidson et al., 2009). Although numerous theories seek to elucidate the college persistence process, only two have offered a comprehensive framework for understanding college departure decisions (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Exploring the Interplay of Motivation and Academic Persistence in Iranian University Students

In contemporary Iran, the aspiration to succeed in entrance exams for a variety of universities, including National and Azad University, is a pivotal goal for pre-university students. Despite this shared goal, students exhibit diverse motivating factors, and their persistence in college can be influenced by a range of psychological and educational elements.

Once students enroll in university, some may reconsider their studies and contemplate changing their majors. The complex interplay of psychological and educational factors significantly impacts students' persistence and retention. Failure to provide educators in post-secondary education with insights into the variables associated with academic persistence could hinder the development of effective instructional methods, considering both educational and psychological factors, to support students in their academic journey.

Differentiating between students who will or will not graduate remains a complex and uncertain task (Davidson et al., 2009). Addressing this question requires a thorough examination of students’ motivation constructs. Previous research has established a close

relationship between students' SRL strategies and their motivation (Hrbackovaa & Suchankovaa, 2016; Mezei, 2008). Recognized as a key predictor of academic motivation and achievement, SRL plays a crucial role in students' educational journeys (Zumbrunn et al., 2011).

Moreover, various studies delve into the intricate connection between persistence and motivation. Scholars broadly characterize student persistence as the individuals' journey toward achieving an academic goal (Leppel, 2001). The pursuit of both personal and academic goals involves various motivating factors. As mentioned earlier, the link between motivation, academic persistence, and individuals' experiences aligns with the hypothesis that students' motivation influences their academic persistence. Researchers such as Weiner (1965) and Allen (1999) have delved into this relationship, while studies on the interplay between self-regulated learning, persistence (Cabaña, 2011; Zimmerman, 1990), and self-determined motivation (Boekaerts, 1996; Zumbrunn, 2011) contribute to our understanding of this complex dynamic.

Academic Persistence

Academic Persistence refers to students' perceptions of their commitment to continuing their education at their respective institutions. The notion of persistence attitude relates to one's intentions and eagerness to progress through a degree program, potentially indicating subsequent persistence decisions and actions. These attitudes often reflect students' overall satisfaction with the quality of faculty instruction and available support programs on campus (Barbatis, 2010). While some level of generality in research findings is reasonable, it is increasingly evident that variables significantly influencing the persistence decisions of one student or group may have weak or no correlation with the persistence of other undergraduates (Davidson et al., 2009).

CONCLUSION

The interrelationship among EFL learners, particularly Iranians, regarding self-regulated learning, self-determined motivation, and academic persistence has not been comprehensively investigated in Iranian university contexts. Studying this interrelationship is crucial to determine whether any correlation exists among these three variables and whether motivation serves as a mediating factor between self-regulated learning and academic persistence. The research agenda in second language learning motivation needs reopening, emphasizing the need to explore the impact of self-determined motivation and self-regulated learning on the academic persistence behaviors of Iranian EFL students.

Despite searching the internet and academic sites, no studies on this relationship in Iranian contexts have been identified, leading to uncertain results. Establishing a positive relationship through this study could guide experts and educators in creating a more effective educational atmosphere, considering students' motivation and learning strategies at pre-university levels. The reviewed sources synthesize varied literatures and perspectives, investigating the independent and interconnected constructs of student motivation and self-regulated learning and their correlation with academic persistence.

An efficient system to decrease attrition should not only cater to at-risk students but also formulate interventions customized to the collective data needs of those overseeing student groups (Davidson et al., 2009). The conceptualization of the construct of self-determined motivation and its associations with self-regulated second language learning behaviors is crucial for attaining academic persistence as a goal. This study seeks to revitalize and redirect the minds, hearts, and wills of college students, recognizing both educational and psychological factors as pivotal elements for success.

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