

Is the Use of Self-Regulatory Strategies by Second Language Kurdish Learners Effective? A case study

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Abstract: The recent interest in the active role of students in the classroom helped self-regulation to obtain a somewhat widespread popularity in the field of language teaching. This study aims to investigate self-regulation amongst learners of English in Kurdistan, and if the lack of self-regulatory strategies might be contributing to the lack of satisfactory achievement amongst them despite their interest and attempts for learning. One hundred forty-four students from three language centres and three universities in Erbil city filled out a questionnaire of 24 items which were categorized as six strategies of self-regulation. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data generated from 17 interviews of students, teachers, and teacher-trainers in Kurdistan. The findings of this study reveal that Kurdish learners do not make effective use of self-regulatory strategies, and they have high and at time unrealistic expectations about teachers and course books. Findings also reveal that the vast majority of language teachers in Kurdistan are not aware of self-regulation strategies, and that second language teacher training programmes do not comprise self-regulation in their curriculum. This study is the first attempt in Kurdistan and adds to the literature a new context for self-regulation. The contribution of this study can help other researchers in conducting more studies to investigate self-regulation and its effect on increasing efficacy and motivation amongst second language learners in Kurdistan.

Key Word: Self-regulation, Self-regulatory strategies, Motivation, Second language learning.

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I. Introduction

Self-regulation has recently become one of the important topics in the field of applied linguistics. Self-regulation is defined as one's own created thoughts, behaviours and feelings that are all directed to achieve a self-set goal (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulated learners are those who can monitor, direct, and regulate their actions to attain the goals of self-improvement, expanding expertise, and increase information; as a result, they will acquire autonomy and control in their learning. Not every student is self-regulated, but there are ways in which students can become self-regulated learners. The use of authentic materials and repeated practices in school can prompt self-regulation, and explicit instructions about self-regulation and engaging students in practices that require self-regulation such as collaborative learning projects are believed to promote self-regulation (Paris & Paris, 2001).

In the field of language learning, it has been validated that self-regulation has an important role in individuals' learning process. Self-regulation is a very helpful technique to master the use of a foreign language (Magno, 2009; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997b). The significance of self-regulation lies on its impact on learners' behaviour, and the changes that happen in the outcomes once they adopt the strategies of self-regulated learning. Self-regulation has become an interesting topic in the field of second language acquisition, and many empirical studies have been conducted to investigate more aspects and effects of self-regulation. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have been attempted regarding self-regulation in the Kurdish context, that is, learners in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

This study will shed light on one of the important topics in the field of applied linguistics and will help other Kurdish scholars to investigate more about the topic. In addition, it can encourage language training institutions and universities to benefit from self-regulation theory and incorporate self-regulation strategies into their curriculum and programmes. Furthermore, the powerful contribution of self-regulated learning in high academic achievement and significant progress in second language learning can provide a stimulus to people in charge of education and curriculum designers to make changes and decide on specific actions that promote English language learning, especially in public schools where English education has been of little effect. This study aims investigating the impact of contextual factors on self-regulation. This study attempts to achieve the aims by finding the answers to these research questions:

1. Do Kurdish learners make use of self-regulated learning strategies when learning English as a second language?
2. What are the contextual factors that have impacts on students' self-regulation?
3. To what extent are the Kurdish second language teachers aware of self-regulated learning strategies?
4. Do EFL and ESL training programmes include self-regulation as part of the curriculum?

As no studies have ever been conducted on self-regulation in the context of Kurdistan, this will be a pioneering study. The results of this empirical investigation will be useful for English teachers, language centre administrators, course designers, teacher trainers, educators, policy makers, and officials at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education in Kurdistan. They can use the outcome of this research to make necessary reforms in how the business of English education (both learning and teaching) is currently conducted in the Region. Additionally, this research will contribute to the wider body of research in the field of self-regulation within the educational psychology and second language acquisition (SLA).

II. Literature Review

2.1 What is self-regulated learning?

Many scholars have identified different characteristics and offered varied definitions of self-regulated learners. Definitions of self-regulation differ based on different theoretical perspectives. Zimmerman (2002) defined self-regulation as a process that directs learners to transform their mental abilities into academic skills. Likewise, Cleary and Zimmerman stated that self-regulation is a complex process of integrating key motivational variables and self-processes, and self-regulated learners are described as learners who initiate to direct their strategies and behaviour to achieve a self-set goal (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004). It is worth mentioning, Ibrahim (2017) states that directed motivational current “DMCs are periods of exceptional motivational intensity in goal-directed behavior. Once applied in second language learning contexts, a DMC enables learners to function at an optimal level of engagement and productivity.” (p. 31) Directed Motivational Current (DMC) In his definition of self-regulated-learning, Pintrich stated that students could control their learning by using cognitive and metacognitive strategies and resource management strategies, too, “self-regulated learning is defined as the strategies that students use to regulate their cognition (i.e., use of various cognitive and metacognitive strategies) as well as the use of resource management strategies that students use to control their learning” (Pintrich, 1999, p. 1)

One of the most prominent, adaptive, and useful aspects of self is the ability to change itself. Thus, self-regulation can be defined as the capacity for changing oneself to fit the environment better. Self-regulation is originated to make the theory of learning more flexible and developed in order to comprise a greater amount of human behaviour (Baumeister, 1998). Similar to Pintrich's definition, Cazan defined self-regulated learning as the learning, which is directed by metacognition, strategic action, and motivation to learn (Cazan, 2012). Based on the definitions mentioned, self-regulation is one's use of some strategies that lead to remarkable changes in behaviour and learning outcomes.

Self-regulation is closely related to motivation; therefore, it is considered as self-determination using the concepts of the internalization of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996). In addition, Sansone and Thoman (2005) stated that maintaining motivation, not only behaviour, over the long term, is the most critical task of self-regulation.

2.2 Self-regulation and personality

Presently, the five families of personality traits (the Big Five), Openness to Experiences, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, and Conscientiousness have been the most widely accepted system for adult personality (Duckworth, Kirby, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2013). By the same token, self-regulation is considered by many psychologists to be identical with Conscientiousness (Caspi & Shiner, 2006). Other psychologists proposed that self-regulation is also related to other Big Five traits. For Example, Whiteside and Lynam (2001) proposed that an individual's ability of thinking and planning before acting and the regulation of the behaviour against frustrations are characteristics of Conscientiousness, while the ability to regulate immediate and negative emotions coincides with Emotional Stability.

In addition, inclination to have strong impetus toward risky activities relates to Extraversion. In a similar manner, children's regulation of impulses in the situations of interaction with adults and friends can be considered as a clear conceptual link with Agreeableness (Tsukayama, Duckworth, & Kim, 2013).

2.3 Self-regulated learning in EFL classrooms in Kurdistan

The world has become more and more globalized, and English is used as an international language. Therefore, for efficient and successful communication in English; attention is drawn to the improvement of the English language proficiency (Ekhlis & Shangarffam, 2013). At the same time, proficiency can be defined as “the degree of competence or the capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point

in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method (Briere, 1971, p. 385). In other words, proficiency in a language is the degree of an individual's mastery of a language. Taking into account the status of English language in the world and the importance of proficiency, it has become an urgent need for people all over the world to learn English proficiently significantly in Kurdistan, as it witnesses rapid changes and is becoming more open to the outside world. In addition, proficiency in English is becoming one of the admission requirements of many higher education institutions and to one's career.

Accordingly, people try to learn the language in the shortest time resorting to different resources and teaching courses. According to my knowledge about the Kurdish context, learners mostly expect to learn and use the English language proficiently through the use of a textbook or by the help of teachers only. Moreover, it has been noticed that students in all stages of schools (primary and secondary) are not able to use English fluently, and they have to attend the foundation courses when they apply for English medium universities, and they also struggle even there to reach the required level of English language proficiency (Rahman, 2020). Describing the educational system and the formal school practices of the public schools in the region may give justifications for students' low levels of English language proficiency. The Ministry of Education in Kurdistan Region restricts all the public schools to use only one course-book for the English lessons, and it is the only source used by teachers and students to study and learn the English language. Besides, English is used (if it is used properly or regularly) only during the English classes and inside the classrooms and the formal language of the school's medium is Kurdish. In addition, the classrooms are very poorly provided with the teaching aids and other support materials to be used for enhancing students' use of language and providing enough opportunities to speak the English language.

Furthermore, teachers are not trained well to have wide knowledge about the different methodologies of teaching a second language, so they mostly follow the traditional methods and try their best to prepare students for the exams. Also, the mother tongue is mostly used by teachers and students to explain the target language and even for classroom instructions. In general, the main target or the learning goal for both teachers and students is to do well for the exams as they are the only path for reaching a new stage of academic achievement.

To promote self-regulated learning in ESL/EFL classrooms in Kurdistan, first, English language teachers must be aware of the various strategies of self-regulated learning and the importance of these strategies for Kurdish learners. In addition, English language teachers should have the knowledge of teaching self-regulated strategies in order to change students' attitude and beliefs about the ways of learning a second language and how to motivate students to become autonomous learners that can use various resources for learning a second language and be able to overcome the social and cultural constraints which impede their learning.

III. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research design and instruments.

The study is designed using a mixed method. Firstly, a quantitative method was used to learn whether Kurdish L2 learners make use of the self-regulatory strategies. For that, a questionnaire comprising six major components of self-regulation was given to a sample of adult learners of English across a number of universities and language centres. However, since self-regulation was assumed to be a totally new concept for learners and educators in Kurdistan, a qualitative interview was seen as necessary because of the risk of relying on self-report as the only means of collecting data about the phenomenon of self-regulation. This use of a mixed-method is primarily the perception of the researcher that using both methods would only make this research more systematic, more robust and more reliable (Burns, 1997). As such, this choice was a methodological, rather than an epistemological one.

From a paradigm perspective and as a novice researcher, I did not completely align myself with a particular paradigm only. To me, any social or psychological phenomenon may benefit from a positivist perspective in that the social world can be independently studied as a natural phenomenon making a causal relationship (Krauss, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), whereas taking an interpretivist or constructivist paradigm might be used to further understand the phenomenon from a human experience perspective (MacIntosh & Caldwell, 2014). As such and in accordance with more trends in research in education and social sciences, a mixed method can help make investigation more efficient, critical and with a higher degree of impact because figures can be very persuasive to policy-makers whereas stories are more easily remembered and repeated by them for illustrative purposes (Gorard, 2004, p. 7).

3.2 Participant of the study

Three types of participants were comprised in the present study (students, teachers, and teacher trainers). For the quantitative data, 144 students who were learning English as a second language were chosen from six different places in Erbil. Some of the participants were students at the University of Kurdistan Hewler

who were attending the foundation courses which are specifically designed for those students who need a higher level of English language proficiency to be qualified enough to study in the University colleges. Some other participants were students at Tishk International University who were studying English in the preparation year to be qualified to attend the different colleges of the university.

A number of the participants were first-year students at Salahaddin University, College of Education, English Language Department. Other participants were students from three different language centres in Erbil, where they offer language courses for different levels and also the preparation courses for IELTS and TOEFL exams. The language centres were: Language Centre of Salahaddin University, Macos ESL Centre for learning and teaching, Collins College for learning English. The participants were from males and females and aged 17 to 50 years. For the qualitative data, 9 students, 4 teachers, and 3 teacher trainers were interviewed.

3.3 Coding and analysis of the questionnaire and interview data

For the quantitative part of the study, 144 students were randomly chosen from the six places to answer the questionnaires. All the participants were confirmed that their responses will be anonymous and confidential and that their participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were introduced and explained for the participants, and they were given enough time to fill in the questionnaires inside their classrooms. At the bottom of the questionnaires, students were asked if they were interested in doing interviews, they can write their names and phone numbers.

The qualitative data was collected by conducting interviews with four English language teachers, three teacher trainers, and nine students. All the participants were verbally informed that the interview would remain confidential, and nicknames will be used in the study. Students who were interested in doing the interviews were phoned to arrange place and date for the interviews. The reliability of the structured questions was checked by conducting a pilot interview with a student and a teacher. Each participant was interviewed separately and in different places and dates.

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS statistic programme version 22. The data were entered into the SPSS program and was analysed using, correlation between the six strategies, T-test for gender, One-Way ANOVA for age, One-sample T-test for median and SD for the use of all the six strategies of self-regulation.

In total, a corpus of 51,745 words was transcribed. The interviews were transcribed literally. The interviews obtained in Kurdish were translated into English by the researcher and then went through the English versions to check for accuracy against the recordings. A thematic analysis was deployed to data analysis. Thematic analysis is an approach for characterizing, analysing, and reporting themes in the data. It also regulates and describes the data in rich detail.

IV. Result and Discussion

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the four main research questions of the thesis: whether Kurdish L2 learners are self-regulated learners; if not, what the obstacles might be; whether L2 teachers teach self-regulation; and finally, if self-regulation is part of teacher training programmes in Kurdistan. Using a mixed-method approach in analysing

4.1 Students' awareness of the use of self-regulated learning strategies

Even though some of the results from the questionnaires show that the students seem to be highly self-regulated, an in-depth analysis through the qualitative data revealed that is not actually the case. The results from the qualitative data show that self-regulatory learning strategies are indeed not used by the learners, and they even do not have any specific or systematic regimens for learning. They mostly rely on their teachers and the course-books instead of making use of their own personalised learning tactics and strategies.

However, this contrast in the results is perhaps due to the students' perceptions about questionnaires and also that questionnaires can only obtain data from respondents' self-report perspective. Students seem to be thinking that they are self-regulated. Moreover, the questionnaires do not tell us much about the degree of self-regulation amongst students. This result could also be due to a sense of overconfidence amongst students in Kurdistan and certainly a lack of understanding of what self-regulation is. The result from the qualitative data is compatible with a study conducted in the Turkish context, which is also similar to the Kurdish context due to a shared cultural background. The participants of the control group in the experiential study of Bilican and Yesilbursa (2015) did not use any strategies of self-regulation during the period of a training session for the treatment group. Thus, the control group who represented the majority of students in the Turkish context seem to be similar to students in the Kurdish context in that they do not make use of self-regulation strategies.

The theoretical premise of using self-regulatory strategies is that when students adopt the strategies, they become independent learners and can evaluate their progress rather than relying on teachers and course-books which may never satisfy customised needs of all L2 learners. Practically, teachers can encourage students

to use self-regulation strategies and give them more opportunities to evaluate and assess their learning on a continuous basis.

The results from the qualitative data also show that Kurdish students are struggling with time management. Despite their interest in the language, they cannot make proper use of their time for their learning. It seems that Kurdish learners are not taught from the early stages of school how to set goals and how to plan for achieving them because when students can set goals, they can adopt a time-management strategy. Teachers can help students face the challenge of time-management strategy through helping them to plan for their lessons and develop a personal timeline for accomplishing learning tasks and goals.

4.2 Intervention programmes to encounter learner beliefs

One of the findings of this study was that Kurdish learners have very high expectations from language courses, teachers, and course-books. They want to learn English very fast and reach a high level of proficiency. The in-depth analysis of the qualitative data showed that Kurdish students mostly rely on teachers and course-books to become good English users. As a result, active learning is not expected to occur amongst these learners (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013).

The Kurdish learners' beliefs about learning a second language might be explained in the light of the students' early experiences in studying English at primary and secondary stages. In the early stages of school, students were taught to study and be ready for exams, and therefore they mostly memorized the materials. Furthermore, it seemed that teachers were using very traditional ways of teaching, and they mainly focused on the content of the course-books as the main source for students. Another reason for this result is perhaps related to the increasing need for English as it is becoming a main condition for employment in Kurdistan. This result suggests that the EFL/ESL settings in Kurdistan are not designed to promote independent learning and change students' attitudes toward learning a second language.

The results also might be an alarm to both the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to implement intervention programmes in the curriculum and the current teaching practices in schools. The learners' belief about learning a second language is congruent to the lack of self-regulation amongst Kurdistan's students. Comprising self-regulatory strategies in the teaching practices can result in major changes in the learners' beliefs. There is a great need for conducting more studies in the Kurdish context to investigate and find out more reasons behind Kurdish learners' dominant beliefs about how a second language is learned and mastered.

4.3 Incorporating self-regulation in the teacher-training programmes

The results of this study show that Kurdish English language teachers are not aware of the strategies of self-regulation, and they do not teach the strategies in the class to help their students to become masters of their own learning. Teaching self-regulatory strategies has found to be effective in promoting independent learning. Cohen (2000), for example, concluded that teachers who taught self-regulatory strategies found that their students became more competent in completing learning tasks, carried more responsibility of their learning inside and outside the class and also attained more confidence in learning the second language. It seems that language teachers in Kurdistan have different perceptions about the teaching process. They perceive teaching as a way of preparing students to become successful in exams and formal academic assessments. Moreover, the results of this study show that the teachers think that giving tips and general advice for learning are effective ways to help students improve their learning. This result is compatible with the findings of Waeytens et al. (2002) who found that many teachers think that helping students in their learning can be supported through giving tips and general advice about studying.

On the other hand, the results suggest that the strategies of goal-setting and self-evaluation are the main two strategies that Kurdish teachers of English do not have much awareness of and are therefore not used by them. It seems that Kurdish EFL/ESL teachers accept the role of as the main source of knowledge for students and the only mechanism to measure students' progress through formal tests on a regular basis. L2 teachers are not aware of the different ways of formative assessment to measure students' progress. In addition, they perceive goal-setting as a general attitude for learning rather than a strategy for learning. The lack of the awareness of goal-setting strategy amongst EFL/ESL teachers can lead to students' failure in adopting the other strategies of self-regulation because goal-setting lies in the first phase and at the forefront of self-regulation. The practical implementation is that teachers can help students set short-term goals for their learning and encourage them to use other strategies to achieve their goals. This can be an effective way to persuade students to track their progress on their own and without the need to continuously rely on teachers.

V. Conclusion

The use of self-regulated learning strategies predicts learner independence and high learning achievements. These strategies can be adopted by students without formal instruction, or can be taught explicitly

by teachers in the classroom. Self-regulated learners know how to set goals, manage their time, evaluate their progress, seek help, and face the difficulties of learning. The main objectives of this study were to understand whether self-regulation is used by Kurdistan's second language learners, and, if not, the reasons behind that. It has been the researcher's observation from many years in the language learning settings that Kurdish learners spend a lot of time and money to learn English without reaching an acceptable level.

We hypothesized that the lack of self-regulation might be the reason behind Kurdish learners' low level in English. A mixed method was used for collecting data from three types of participants (students, teachers, and teacher-trainers). The findings of the data provided the answers to the four research questions. Results show that Kurdish learners do not use the strategies of self-regulation, and they mainly rely on teachers and course-books without taking the responsibility of their own learning. In addition, the use of traditional methods of teaching used in schools has created amongst Kurdish learners very high expectations from teachers and courses and a belief that it is possible to learn and master a second language in a very limited time. Moreover, findings show that L2 teachers also are not aware of self-regulation as a concept, and that they do not teach these strategies to students.

5.1 Limitation and possible future studies

This study has had several limitations. First, the study only included 144 students for the quantitative part; a larger sample is needed to reach a more representative conclusion of whether L2 learners in Kurdistan are self-regulated and if there is a difference amongst them on the basis of gender, age, and level. Second, all the participants of the study were from the Erbil city. We need a larger sample which will include participants from other places in Kurdistan to be more representative of the Kurdish context and also to investigate whether there are differences between the different areas in Kurdistan in terms of the use and awareness of self-regulated learning strategies.

This study is the first attempt to investigate self-regulation in the Kurdish context and will open the door for more attempts. Thus, we summarize the recommendations in these points; More empirical investigation studies are needed to be conducted in this field.; We need more in-depth analysis for the qualitative part, especially taking as the sample students and learning about how the lack of self-regulation might hinder their learning; Experimental and longitudinal studies are needed to find out the negative impacts on the lack of self-regulation amongst Kurdistan's learners of a second language.

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