

ACQUISITION OF SELF-REGULATORY LEARNING SKILLS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

The study set out to identify self-regulation learning skills possessed by first year undergraduate students of University of port Harcourt. This was a survey research design, using stratified random sampling technique. All the 1400 first year undergraduate students in Faculty of Education constituted the population and 694 students constituted the sample, Three research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was Self-regulation Skill Questionnaire (SRSQ), which was constructed, validated by experts and administered to the students. Two types of statistical measures, namely, the Mean (X-) and, Standard Deviation (SD) were used. The results showed that students vary in the ways in which they regulate their study. They registered lower mean scores in self-regulation skills in forethought and self reflection. Based on the findings some recommendations were made.

Introduction

One of goals of university education is to enable students become autonomous, independent learners. To achieve this, it is necessary to shift overemphasis from teaching, to facilitating effective learning and promotion, the concept of ownership and reflection on learning.' Bereiter and Scardamalia (1980) (cited in Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2001:97) states that reflection refers to the art of making sense of past experiences for the purposes of orienting oneself for current and for future thought or action, by the time a student enters the university, they are assumed to be sufficiently matured and motivated to organize their own study and attend lectures as appropriate (Stafani, Clarke and Littlejohn, 2000: 163). At this level, students should be able to think for themselves and study independently with proper focus on possible career, employment opportunities and national development for the future. What lecturers actually give in lectures is only the basic of a particular subject matter, all else is left for the students to look up for themselves through reading and research.

One way of learning is through, reading and this can only be accomplished through text-based messages or books. According to Denning and Read (1996:427), books have been said to be 'multi-access, portable databank with search and index facilities. The textbook is most often the primary source of information in schools at all levels in Nigeria. It could be subject-specific, supplementary and reference books, to gather information. Students must become familiar with techniques for effectively studying and learning textbook materials. Most courses at the university levels have lengthy and time consuming reading assignments. Completing reading assignment require time and self-management. In addition, reading supports writing in many ways, good readers are usually good writers (Baker, 1990: 1; Eschtaolze and Rosa, 1991:v-vi; B. Ogbuehi, 2001:78; Obanya, 2002; 185-186) Library, the house of books cannot be ignored in any school system as a way to scholarship.

The transition from senior secondary schools to university is sometimes very difficult for most students (Yorke, 2003: 277). This may be attributed to highly structured learning environment which seems somehow free, but then with academic and non-academic responsibilities attached. The situation calls for self-regulation on the part of students. Students enter university from different entry point: some are entering for the first time while others may be re-entering after a period of employment or raising a family. For these reasons, it may take time to adjust to the demand of higher education. Poor performance in terms of acquired knowledge, skills and desirable attitude to work has been a major concern for academics and employers of labour. The recent lamentation by industry chiefs over the abysmally low quality of Nigeria graduates is a point of reference (Sanyaolu July, 2005). Mayer and Norton (2004) posit that;

Many students are now entering higher education with little idea of what is actually expected of them at university. For some who are first generation students, there is little accumulate family background and experiences to equip them to study at tertiary level; for others, that method that have served them well for A levels and through their school life have been perfectly adequate but will no longer be appropriate (P.389).

The typifies the situation for most first year undergraduates. Building capacity in self-regulation is

an important issue for moulding undergraduates for corporate jobs if they are to be relevant to the demands of knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

How do we in academics reposition students' so as to encourage in them a greater awareness and understanding of themselves as learners, to fill the gaps in workforce preparation since worker skill are different from goods based, economy of yester year, From the rapid and accelerating pace of change, it follows that workers need to update, augment and even replace their old skills at a faster rate. Knowledge and understanding which undergraduate students must embrace before they move into labour market. Schunk and Zimmerman (1998: 104); Zimmerman and Schunk (2004; 152) provide us with a well developed model to explain the link between thinking, action and the environment (problems, situation and learning contexts), within which thinking and action occurs: that is self-regulatory learning. This consists of the ability to orchestrate one's learning: to plan, implement, monitor success and correct errors when appropriate for effective intentional learning (Bransford, Bown and Cocking, 2001: 98). The focus of self-regulation is 'self-management' and reflection. Undergraduate students should be able to plan and manage time effectively, establish a productive work environment and use social resources in this "super complex world" where the way we understand ourselves and how we act in the world is crucial (Barnett, 2000; 303); Ley and Young (2001:94) posited that the message conveyed by self-regulatory learners are that students are responsible for their own behaviour for becoming educated and that learning is a personal experience that requires active and dedicate participation by the students. This brings to mind the focus of constructivism: learners must construct their own knowledge: that instruction must create on active role for the learner and that learning should be situated in authentic activities. Authentic activities are at the heart of self-regulatory learning (Perkins, 1992; 560).

Briggs (1985:195) refers to the idea of'taking control of one's own learning.' Students can set their own goals, observe their own progress and even reinforce themselves for reaching their goals to ensure effective learning. This turns the process of observational learning over to the students (Stefani, 1991: 153). Some social cognitive researchers describe self-regulation as self-generation and self-monitoring of thoughts, feelings and. behaviours in order to reach a goal. Raising students awareness profile on self propelled academic pursuit to consolidate and advance in their quest for knowledge is what Ertmer and Newby (1996: 6) expresses as expert learning.

..Expert learners notice when they are not learning and thus are likely to seek a strategic remedy when faced with learning difficulties... Novice learners, on the other hand, rarely reflect on their own performance and seldom evaluate or adjust their cognitive functioning to meet changing task demands or to correct unsuccessful performances.

Researchers have found that high achieving students are often self-regulatory learners who are usually 'strategically flexible, environmental resourceful and perceptive of personal agency(Santrock, 2001:265; Entwistle, Meyer and Tait, 1999:249). Ertmer and Newby, 1996:76; Ley and Young, 2003:93). Students can be classified as proactive and reactive learners. Proactive learners avoid forethought in order to improve the quality of their work; reactive learners avoid forethought and any attempt to regulate functioning during and after performance. Zimmerman and Schunk, emphasized that dispositions to intentional, learning is a product of sheer will and effort. This is the theoretical framework on which self-regulatory learning is based. Many universities proclaim a commitment to help students learn on paper, very few of them have begun to address explicitly self-regulation issue as an integral component of academic practice and student personal development (Mayer, and Shanahan, 2004:444).

Niyi (2001:6) presents a continuum of self- regulation package: (1) observation level, (2) initiative level, (3) self- centre level, (4) self- regulatory level..This model suggests that learners develop their self-regulation gradually by acquiring knowledge about learning skills, using them , internalizing and finally using them again adaptively.

Jackson .of self-regulation learning skills: forethought, self-reflection and performance, operating within the content of specific environment that is structured by the learner. Forethought in this model involves thinking based on task analysis and motivational beliefs; self-reflection phase involves self-judgments and self-reaction on the bases of self-evaluation; performance is the action part of the process and it is based on attitude and the ability to instruct self and seek help when necessary (Zimmerman, 1999):226). These two models are consistent; both processes could be adjusted on the bases of individual differences.

The intention of this study was to use Jackson's mode! to identify self-regulation learning skills possessed by first year undergraduates at the second semester; knowing what they posses will help in

directing them towards ways of building intellectual capacity to fill important gaps in workforce preparation for future economic growth. To achieve this, the author sought answers to the following question.

1. Which self-regulation forethought skills do first-year do first undergraduate students possess during the second semester?
2. Which self-regulation reflection skills do first year undergraduate students possess during second semester?
3. Which self-regulation performance skills do first-year undergraduate students possess during the second semester.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design. The population consisted of 1400 first year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt for 2004/2005 session. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select seven hundred undergraduates based on five departments. Self-regulation Skills Questionnaire (SRSQ) with thirty items was designed to seek the views of first-year undergraduates on how they regulated their study behaviours after the first semester. The questionnaire (SRSQ) -of 30 items was divided into four parts: A - Personal information; B-Self regulation forethought skills (8-items); C - Self-regulation reflection skills (10-items); D-Self-regulation performance skills (12-items).

The scale ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument was face validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation in terms of clarity of language and relevance of items to contents. To ensure content validity of SRSQ, a well designed blue print was used in developing its items. The psychometric properties of content and construct validity had an internal consistency alpha of .90 ($P < 0.5$) and its reliability co-efficient alpha of .74 ($P < 0.5$). Six hundred and ninety-four copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. Data collected were analysed with mean scores (\bar{X}) and standard deviation.

Results

The result obtained after analyzing the data of this study were presented here according to the research questions. Hence, the results of research question one were presented in table 3.

Table 1: Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (sd) of Students in Self-regulation forethought Skills

S/No	Forethought Skills	X	Sd	Remark
1	I set goals for myself every semester	3.53	1.46	A
2	I use course outlines a lot	3.40	1.46	A
3	I answer guide questions in my books	3.31	1.42	A
4	I set my priorities every week	2.38	1.37	R
5	I do analyze my commitments	2.54	1.42	R
6	I read my lecture notes often	4.41	0.80	A
7	I summarize the contents of my books	2.77	1.42	R
8	I do make comprehensive lecture notes in my courses	2.33	1.40	R
	Total	24.47	10.75	
	Grand total	3.08	1.34	

Note: A = Accepted; R = Rejected

An Observation of the results in Table 1 showed that the students accepted that they possess the following self-regulation forethought skills; set goals, use course outlines, answer guide question and read lecture notes often. The reason for this is because the mean score for these skills were respectively greater than 3.0 which is the criterion mean value. In the contrary, they rejected the following self-regulation forethought skills as the ones they do not possess. These are setting priorities every week, analyzing commitments, summarizing contents of books and making comprehensive lecturer notes in courses they offer.

Table 2: Means (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Students in Self-regulation Reflection Skills

S/No	Self-reflection skills	T	Sd	Remark
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9	<i>I monitor my academic progress</i>	4.57	0.49	A
10	<i>I do take a second look at my assignments</i>	2.45	1.38	R
11	<i>I seek help from my peers anytime I have problems with my studies</i>	4.82	0.39	A
12	<i>I approach my lecturers for assistance anytime I have learning difficulties</i>	2.67	1.48	R
13	<i>I source information in the library on a weekly basis</i>	3.66	1.25	A
14	<i>I keep record of all my results</i>	4.72	JX45__	A
15	<i>I can predict my final result</i>	2.71	1.40	R
16	<i>I visit university guidance and counseling unit often.</i>	1.74	0.45	R
17	<i>I discuss with my course adviser anytime</i>	1.87	0.95	R
18	<i>I do seek reasons for any poor performance I recorded</i>	1.89	0.96	R
	<i>Total</i>	31.10	9.2	
	<i>Grand total</i>	3,11	0.92	

Table 2 showed that they possessed self-regulation reflection skills in the following items: monitoring academic progress, seek helps from peers, source information in the library and that they keep record of their results. The table indicated mean scores of above 3 in the respective items which is the criterion mean value. In the same vein they rejected the following self-regulation reflection skills; taken a second look at assignments, approaching lecturers for assistance anytime they have learning difficulties, they cannot predict their final result, they do not visit university, they cannot predict their final result, they do not visit university guidance and counseling unit, neither do they discuss with their course advisers nor do they seek reasons for any recorded poor performance.

Table 3 Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Students in Self-regulation Performance Skills.

S/No	Self-reflection skills	X	Sd	Remark
19	<i>I learn a lot on my own</i>	3.40	1.56	A
20	<i>I do find means of accomplishing any learning task before me</i>	3.38	1.54	A
21	<i>Step - by - step approach to learning is the style I do adopt</i>	3.52	1.47	A
22	<i>I know my learning style very well</i>	3.96	1.28	A
23	<i>I review my performance every semester</i>	4.20	1.08	A
24	<i>I read with my goal before me •</i>	2.56	1.46	R
25	<i>I can leave school for a while and tins does not affect my studies</i>	1.51	0.64	R
26	<i>I take continuous assessment very serious</i>	4.60	0.73	A
27	<i>I take lecturers very serious</i>	3.14	1.56	A
28	<i>I know that I can learn if I work had</i>	4.78	0.42	A
29	<i>I discuss my progress with my relations</i>	3.52	1.42	A
30	<i>I enjoy what I am learning at school</i>	2.89	1.50	R
		41.46	14.66	
		3.455	1,22	

The result in table 3 revealed that students accepted that they possess the following self-regulation performance skills. They learn a lot on their own, they do fond means of accomplishing any learning task, they believe in step-by-step approach to learning, they know their learning styles, they do review their performance, they take continuous assessment very seriously, they take lectures seriously, they appreciate the fact that they can learn if they work hard, and they discuss their academic process their relations. On. the other hand, and they rejected the fact that they read with goals, the they can leave school at will without effect and that they do enjoy what they are

learning at school. The mean scores for these skills were respectively greater or less than the 3.0 which is the criterion mean value.

Discussion

Self regulation skills is defined as an effort put forth by students to deepen, monitor, manipulate and improve their own learning in relation to the demands of the learning environment. Students who lack these kinds of skills need support and advice about how to raise their study profile, their awareness of their own approaches to study and how to reflect on their own approaches to study, how to reflect on their own study practices.

The study showed that students vary in the ways in which they regulate their own study. Thus it is apparent that they are weak in self-regulation forethought skills and self-reflection skills, This supports the previous findings of Yorke (2001:277) and Meyer and Norton (2004:389), which state that the free nature of university environment coupled with the high demands at tertiary level needs organization of self and time for intentional learning (Bransford, Brown and Cocking 2001:98). Active and dedicated plan for authentic activities is a priority at the university and books are the primary source of information (Denning and Read, / 1996:427). It goes without saying that reading and learning are multistage, interrelated process but not without a goal, Goal-setting is the propelling force for reading and learning.

The low mean scores on self-regulation forethought skills and self-reflection skill may be attributed to lack of self-awareness in terms of what it takes to be an expert learner (Ertmer and Newby, 1996:18). Student need to know and learn what is expected of them in courses and how to approach new learning and study demands. This means becoming actively involved with reading assignments, lectures, and class activities and using writing to learn (Baker, 1990:1; Escholtz and Rosa, 1991:v-vi; Ggbuehi, 2001:78; Obanya, 2002:185-186). In another vein, this may be attributed to large class sizes, lack of basic amenities, less small group and tutorial contact, less interactive teaching and learning and above all, societal attitude towards teaching which does not encourage student-teachers. Besides, the profession is not lucrative.

The implication of this study are that teachers should expose students to self-regulation process. The ability of students to regulate their learning may contribute to motivation and learning. When students make genuine effort towards their study, the result is usually rewarding. The focus of enlightenment should be on time management, resource management, goal setting, success expectation and deep cognitive involvement. Students should be able to identify what the current task requires in terms of cognitive, motivational and environmental strategies and be in the position to determine if their personal resources are adequate to effectively accomplish task (Ertmer and Newby, 1996:6-18). Self-awareness, self-monitoring and self-evaluation are crucial to effective self-regulation and performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. First-semester of first year undergraduate students assessment should be based on formative assessment.
2. Series of assignment should form three quarters of first semester work
3. University orientation programme should last for at least three weeks and it should involve seminars on study skills.
4. Apart from university wide orientation program faculties and department should also embark on orientation programmes for their students.
5. Self-regulation skills should be embedded in instructions and each department should have instruction designers.
6. There should be faculty library in each faculty in the universities.

Conclusion

The following conclusions emanated from the finding of this work:

1. Students vary in the ways in which they regulate their own study.
2. It is apparent that students had low mean scores in self-regulation skills forethought and self-

reflection.

3. The study revealed that self-awareness and self-monitoring ability were lacking among undergraduate students in their first year.

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