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I Think, Therefore I Procrastinate: The Paradox of Self-Regulated Learning

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Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a foundational concept in modern education, it emphasises a student’s ability to set goals, monitor progress and adjust strategies to optimise learning outcomes (Zimmerman, 1990). SRL incorporates three components: cognition, metacognition and motivation (Winne, 2017), which contribute to academic success, in-depth engagement and improved problem-solving skills. By fostering autonomy and resilience, SRL enables individuals to take control of their learning, thus promoting short-term academic achievement as well as long-term mastery (Omari, 2024). Despite the advantages of SRL, there are several barriers that hinder the effective implementation of SRL in higher education.

Whilst SRL has been studied using quantitative methods, which identifies that some students struggle to self-regulate their learning, there is a lack of qualitative evidence that explores why this is so from the perspective of the students. This study explored the challenges that university students face in adopting SRL mechanisms, identifying key obstacles such as environmental influence, personal habits, personality traits and instructional practices.

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), this study examined the subjective experiences of university students, with an aim of providing deeper insights into the barriers of SRL. Findings highlighted economic status, emotional well-being, motivation levels, procrastination tendencies and accessibility issues as key barriers. By addressing these challenges to SRL implementation, educators can develop more efficient teaching strategies, and policies, to support SRL, ultimately enhancing students’ academic performance, and overall well-being. This research contributes to the growing discourse on how SRL can be better integrated into higher education to foster independent, successful learners.

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