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

Dr Valerie Todd

Psychology

vat8@aber.ac.uk

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Overview

- What is Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)?
- Educational context
- This study
- Findings
- What does it mean?
- How can we support students?

What is Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)?

- A student's ability to set goals, monitor progress and adjust strategies to optimise learning outcomes (Zimmerman, 1990)

- Three components:
  - **Cognition** - the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses
  - **Metacognition** - awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes
  - **Motivation** - the reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way

Educational context

Compulsory Education

- Pedagogy
- Teacher is the central authority and directs the learning process
- Learners are dependent on the teacher for knowledge and structure
- Learning is content-driven, with a prescribed curriculum
- External motivation, such as grades or rewards
- Stifles SRL

Higher Education

- Andragogy
- Teacher facilitates self-directed learning with guidance and support
- Learners have their own experiences and knowledge as valuable resources
- Learning is problem-based and relevant to the learner's life and goals
- Internal motivation, such as a desire for self-improvement or career advancement
- Promotes SRL

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Impact of SRL on education

- Fosters intrinsic motivation by allowing students to take autonomous control over their learning, leading to higher engagement levels and resilience and persistence with academic tasks (Omari, 2024)

- Contributes to academic success, in-depth engagement and improved problem-solving skills (Winne, 2017)

- Promotes short-term academic achievement as well as long-term mastery (Omari, 2024)

Barriers to SRL in education

- Environmental factors:
  - Instructional practices
  - Learning environment and resources
  - Educational expectations
- Personal habits:
  - Distractions from technology and social interactions
  - Habits from compulsory education
  - Prioritising other factors

This study

- SRL has been studied using quantitative methods which identifies that some students struggle to self-regulate their learning

- Lack of qualitative evidence that explores <u>why</u> this is so from the perspective of the students

- Explored the challenges that university students face in adopting SRL

- **What are the barriers hindering the development and implementation of self-regulated learning strategies amongst university students?**

Method

- Qualitative data generated via individual in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted on Teams

- Interview schedule informed by existing literature

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to understand SRL as part of the lived experience of university students

- Emphasis on the individual's perspective and interpretation of those experiences

Participants

- 8 participants; 3 male and 5 female

- Recruited via social media and represent different universities

- Self-selected sample – potential bias in favour of students who struggle with SRL

- Undergraduate academic disciplines studied: war studies, history, economics, business studies, law, sport psychology and computer science

Findings
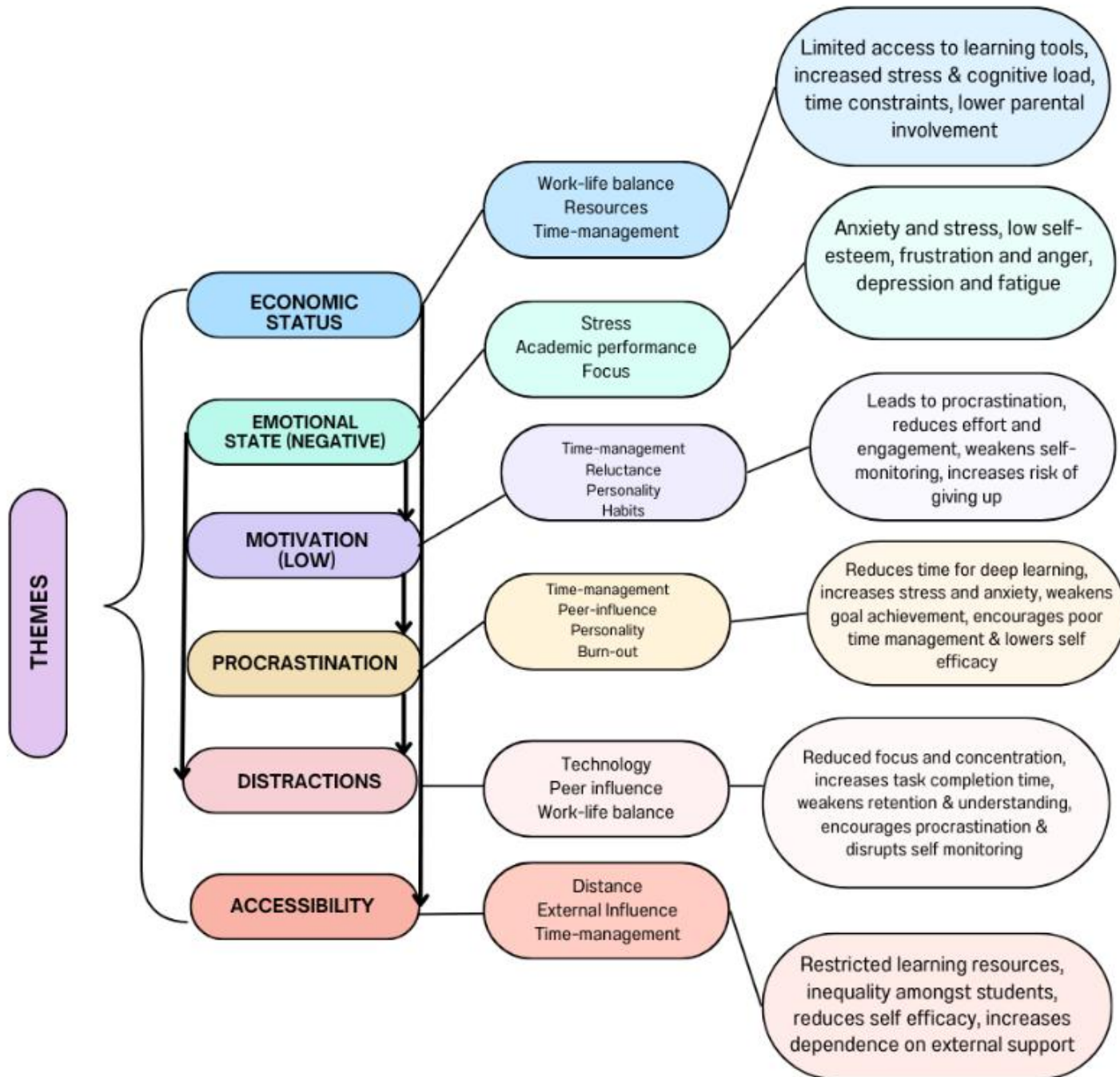
Economic Status

- Low economic status was experienced as a motivation to study:

"Sometimes those who are in higher economic statuses [pause] know that they've got something to fall back on [pause] having parents that come from a low economic background that pushed me to study. I do believe that it is also a big influence on how a person studies"

- Broader social capital may be a barrier for those with a safety net

Economic Status

- Economic status also makes it more likely that they have work commitments so have less time for studying:

"I had a part time job as well, so it was like I wasn't putting in the same amount of hours as my friend who had the extra time to do it, her grades were a lot higher than mine because she had the extra time to do it. It's so hard to balance it."

Accessibility

- Difficulties accessing learning materials was a barrier:

   "I go to a small university anyways, I feel like [pause] I feel like they don't always access the texts I need to get into [pause] we just don't pay for access"

- Learners at universities with less funding may face barriers to SRL that go beyond effort or motivation

- The difficulty to access critical academic texts suggests a wider systemic issue, where economic disparities between higher-education institutions perpetuate educational inequalities

Emotional State

- Feelings can hijack self-regulation:

  "Sometimes my mental state, so it's a fluctuation on certain days [pause] there will be some days where I'm raring to go on and then there's some days where I can't do it [pause] the day is absolutely kicking me while I'm down and that itself is almost like a-an irregular regulator as to how certain study times will work or just certain activities in general"

  - Not in control of learning behaviours

  - Dysregulation can impair metacognitive functioning

Emotional State

- Emotional state influences studying self-efficacy:

  "I felt the end of last semester when I was going through a really tough time [pause] I found it a lot more difficult to get my head into studying, and now that I'm in a much more positive, like, really eager to get my dissertation stuff done, I'm more motivated to study now than I was a few months ago"

- Learners feel like passengers in their own heads

- Difficulty regulating learning as it affects motivation

Motivation

- Motivation is determined by mental states and can lead to disengagement:

"For me, it's like when I'm homesick [pause] I have no motivation at all [pause] like I don't want to do anything [pause] I'm like [pause] I just want to get into bed and cry"

"In terms of times I felt particularly unmotivated, and I have like a real kind of like mental health breakdown but like I didn't want to go back to uni in my third year, yeah [pause] after Christmas I like I don't know I just hit like a complete mental barrier where I didn't want to go, I didn't have the energy [pause] I didn't have the motivation"

Motivation

- When students lack external accountability, and internal drive is low, it can be the case that basic academic behaviours can become a challenge:

"Just trying to find the motivation to actually go to lectures [pause] living on your own [pause] there's no pressure from anyone else"

"There's definitely an element of needing to get myself up and actually get shit [pause] I mean stuff [pause] done"

Motivation

- Motivation may be determined by perceived utility or necessity of academic success:

"I don't really care that much [pause] 'cause I've already got a graduate outcome [pause] so I'm not really arsed about getting a first to be honest with you [pause] like I have a guaranteed position regardless of what I get in uni"

- This demonstrates a decline in goal-value belief which impacts SRL strategies

Procrastination

- A voluntary delay of intended tasks, despite expecting negative consequences (Steel, 2007)

- For some learners it is a strategy to increase motivation based on external pressures:

"I procrastinate everything for the last-minute [pause], it's the time pressure of knowing the deadline's coming up, that's what gets me motivated"

- Adrenalin

- Eustress/distress

Procrastination

- For many learners, procrastination is determined by fear and anxiety:

"It's that initial starting out, it's like, it's so daunting to me"

"I never know where to start, I get scared and the more I think about it the less I can face it, so I avoid it and end up feeling even worse"

"Every time I say I will start early, but the anxiety kicks in the more I think about it"

Distractions

- Distractions are sometimes used when procrastinating

- Reduce feelings of anxiety

- Can be self-sabotaging

- Undermines the ability to remain focused on academic tasks

- 2 main sources of distraction:
  - Technology distractions
  - Social distractions

Technology distractions

- Phones are the most frequently cited distraction:

  "My room, my phone [pause] those are the two biggest distractors"

- The reliance on digital tools for academic tasks can simultaneously support and hinder learning:

"I would say definitely working on technology because I do most of my work on my laptop [pause] so it's quite easy to get distracted"

Social distractions

- Social activities are more pleasurable than working, so good intentions can be easily interrupted:

"Probably just being social, I find that I tried to go to the library with my friends or I, I have plans to do work [pause] and then someone will be like, start chatting to me"

"And then my mate's like 'oh do you want to come to the pub'"

- Social connections are important for mental wellbeing, but there needs to be clear boundaries so that SRL is not undermined

Relationships between barriers

- The relationships between each barrier is important, they do not operate in isolation

- SRL barriers operate in feedback loops

- Low motivation may lead to procrastination, and even distractions, which then fuels anxiety and self-doubt, further reducing motivation and perpetuating the cycle

- Financial strain may increase emotional stress, undermining concentration, and encouraging procrastination

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Feedback loops
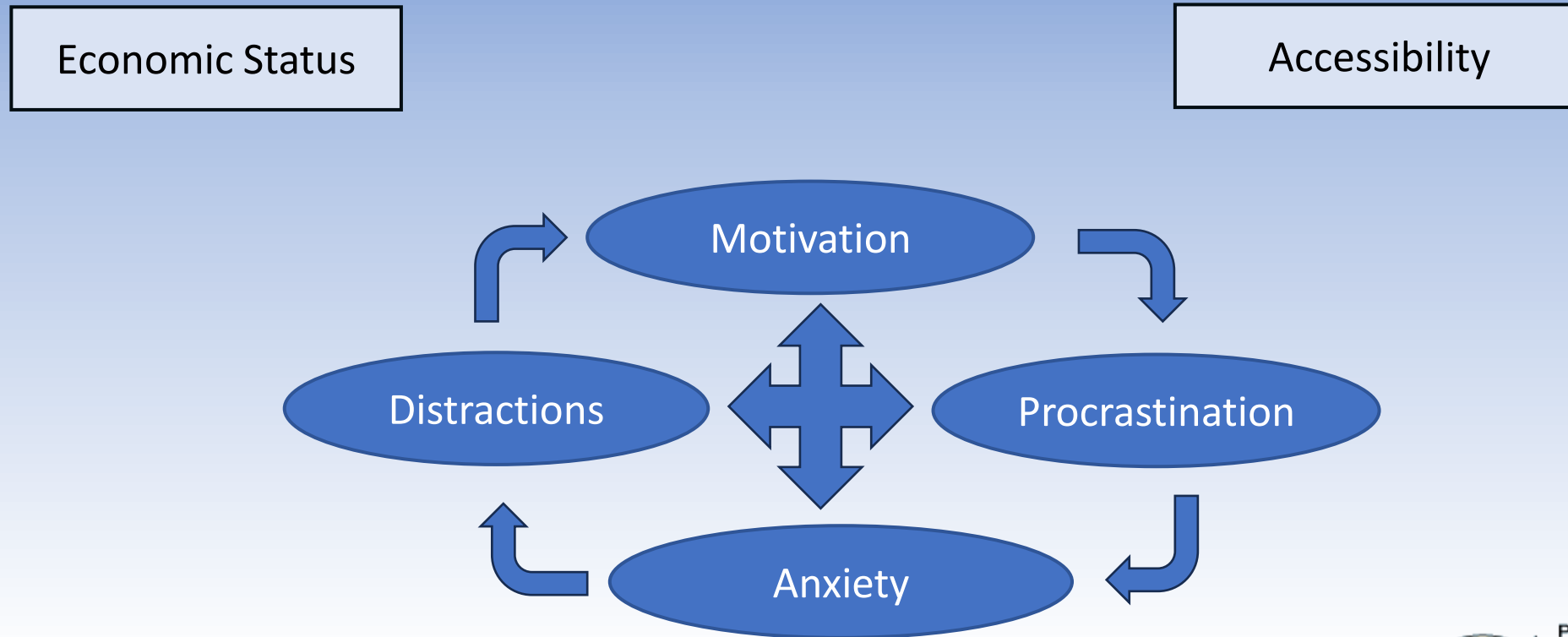
What does it mean?

- Thinking about academic tasks can create a barrier to action
- Even highly motivated learners can struggle to translate intention into action when faced with persistent environmental, emotional, and cognitive disruptions
- Need to develop interpersonal self-regulation skills, such as boundary setting, and the ability to seek out learning environments that align with cognitive and emotional needs
- Without these skills, social and technological distractions may continue to compromise learners' ability to meet their academic goals, regardless of their internal motivation

What does it mean?

- Challenges the notion that SRL can be taught through short-term interventions

- Requires an ecological approach, addressing the broader conditions under which students are expected to learn

- Adopt a systems-based understanding of SRL, recognising that improving one domain could positively influence others and further contribute to academic growth and achievement, fostering life-long learning and long-term mastery

How can we support students?

- Integrate SRL development into the curriculum from the beginning
- Opportunities for students to build and practice these skills across different modules
- Additional support sessions
  - E.g., Drop-in procrastination busters, motivation sessions, etc.
- Strengthen access to mental health services, financial support, and mentoring to address the broader determinants of learning behaviours

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Thank you for listening

Email me for references

vat8@aber.ac.uk