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Contextual Discrepancies in EFL Learners' Self-Regulatory Skills

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Abstract
The ultimate objective of any educational endeavor is to train learners who assume responsibility and accountability in acquiring the required knowledge and expertise. This is known as self-regulatory learning and is believed to fluctuate in line with external factors. In the present study, it was presumed that setting acts as an umbrella rudiment which subsumes other cognitive factors conducive to learning. This study, hence, investigated the significant differences between EFL learners' self-regulatory skills in two different contexts, as well as the confounding effects of self-regulation on language achievement. To do so, two samples were utilized; the first sample comprised 155 students studying in the language institutes of Mashhad, and the second one, 53 English learners at a university in this city. For measuring self-regulatory skills, Self-Regulation Trait (SRT) questionnaire designed by Herl et al (1999) was employed. It contained four subscales (planning, monitoring, self-efficacy, and effort). For obtaining students' language achievement, they were asked to write their GPA. Convenience sampling was used to collect data and all the participants kindly accepted to participate in the current study. The results indicated that among the subscales, self-efficacy and effort obtained the highest mean while planning obtained the lowest mean. Furthermore, there were positive associations between learners' language achievement and self-regulation, with planning and self-efficacy having the highest correlations. However, the result of the *t*-test for finding a difference between university and institutes students revealed no significant differences between them regarding the self-regulation and its comprising factors.

Keywords: contextual factors, language achievement, self-regulation

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INTRODUCTION

Learning that is guided by metacognition, strategic action, and motivation to learn is called self-regulation. Pintrich (2000) defined self-regulation as a term which involves three general strategies: 1. Cognitive learning strategies: the learning strategies that operate directly on incoming information in ways that enhance learning. It comprises rehearsal (repeating keywords), organizing (summarizing what has been read or heard), and inferencing (the process of arriving at a hypothesis or idea on the basis of other knowledge or ideas). 2. Metacognitive strategies: it involves thinking about the mental processes used in the learning process, monitoring while it is happening, and evaluating learning. 3. Resource management strategies: it is like setting aside a regular time and place for language study.

Based upon Pintrich (2000), learning is self-regulated when the process is active and applicable and the learners try to set the goal for their own learning; they attempt to regulate, monitor, and control their motivation, behavior and their cognition. Self-regulated learning needs students to be actively involved in their learning process; so they can lead their emotions, thought, and actions in a way to affect their learning and motivation (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). In other words, self-regulation happens when people set goals, make plans, decide on strategies for achieving the goals, and evaluate their own performance. Also, the experiences could be useful for the future performance.

Zimmerman (2002) suggested that definitions of self-regulated learning include three dimensions: using of learning strategies, responsiveness to the feedback of learning effectiveness, and interdependent motivational processes. Students who are self-regulated select and use appropriate strategies in order to achieve academic outcomes based upon the feedbacks of the learning effectiveness. Zimmerman suggested learners who are self-regulated view acquisition as a process which is systematic and controllable; these students are behaviorally, motivationally, and metacognitively active participants in their own learning.

Self-regulated learners are aware of searching information when needed and take the necessary steps to master it. They view acquisition as a systematic process that can be controlled. Also, they accept the responsibility for achieving outcomes (Zimmerman & Martinez Pons, 1990). All theorists interested in self-regulation share the idea that students regulating their own learning are actively involved in the process of learning and thus can guide their thoughts, emotions, and actions in a way to positively affect their learning and motivation (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005).

The models proposed by Zimmerman (2000), Zimmerman, Bonner, and Kovach (1996) have been used by most of the self-regulation training studies. The studies showed that Zimmerman's self-regulation training model was effective in increasing self-regulation strategies and also academic achievement of the students (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2005; Camahalan, 2006; Schmitz &Wiese, 2006).

Self-oriented feedback loop plays an important role in defining self-regulation. This loop is a cyclic process in which students monitor the effectiveness of their own methods or strategies and react to it in different ways (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Most of the researchers suggest that self- regulation depends on the continuing feedback of learning effectiveness (e.g., Mace, Belfiore, & Shea, 1989).

Most models of metacognitive control or self-regulating strategies include three general types of strategies: planning, monitoring, and regulating (see, for example, Corno, 1986; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986, 1988). Planning activities include setting goals for studying like skimming a text, generating questions before reading a text, and doing a task. These activities help learners to plan their use of cognitive strategies and also activate relevant aspects of their schemata.

Monitoring activities include tracking of attention while reading, self-testing by using questions about the text to check the understanding, and using test-taking strategies. Regulation strategies are closely related to monitoring strategies. As students monitor their own learning and performance based on some specific criterion, this monitoring process suggests the need for regulation processes to come closer to the criterion. All these strategies are assumed to improve learning by helping students correct their studying behavior.

The reasons of choosing a particular method or strategy by students should be taken into account. Self-regulated learning includes different delimited strategies, methods, and effort. If the outcome of the efforts is not attractive, students will not be motivated for self-regulating. An important point is that students' learning and motivation are interdependent processes. They cannot be fully understood apart from each other. Students' perceptions of self-efficacy are both a motivation for learning and an outcome of attempts to learn (Schunk, 1989).

One of the perspectives which is built upon social cognitive theoretical foundations is academic self-regulation. It addresses the development and impact of self- regulatory characteristics of learners on their success or failure in academic settings (Schunk, 1989). It is defending as ways of approaching academic tasks that students learn by experience and self-reflection. Successful learners in academic settings tend to use effective self-regulated learning characteristics.

Self-regulation is an important aspect of metacognition. Metacognition appears in Vygotsky's work primarily in the sense of consciousness, which requires abstraction and controlled attention (Fox & Riconscente, 2008). A further aspect of metacognition is awareness of the structure of one's own thought processes and of how to control the thoughts by using signs. Another aspect of the knowledge of one's own mental capacity is the awareness of self as actor and as subject presumed in the use of inner speech for self-direction. Internalization of the directive and indicative speech used by others and then toward others and objects that becomes inner speech (Vygoteski ,1981 p. 188) implies an inner self that knows itself somehow as both obedient, attentive listener and commanding, indicating speaker. Voluntary attention is the most basic form of self-

organization of behavior; the ability to direct our mental focus toward a given situation, aspect, or task, is presupposed in all other forms of self-directed activity.

Research in the progressive addition of content in educational courses revealed that portfolio assignments are best used towards the end of the course for making the students more self-regulated. One example is a study conducted by Strijbos, Meeus, and Libboton (2007) to examine the effects of a portfolio programme on self-regulation. The results indicated that the portfolio programme improves students' capacity to go through their learning process independently. It also appears that students do not set new goals for themselves; it means that that they cannot regulate their own learning process on a wide-ranging basis because they have not mastered all the components of the self-regulation cycle.

Phan (2010) investigated critical thinking as a self-regulatory process component in teaching and learning. He argued that both theoretical orientations (critical thinking and self-regulation) are organized in a dynamic interactive system of teaching and learning. Based on the existing evidence, he suggested two important points: (i) critical thinking is another cognitive strategy for self-regulation and learners may use in their learning, and (ii) critical thinking can be a product of various antecedents such as different self-regulatory strategies.

In 2011, Mohammadi Ghavam, Rastegar, and Razmi explored the relationship between the subscales of achievement goals and the frequency of metacognitive reading strategies in Iranian EFL learners. For this, Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) developed by Elliot and McGregor (2001) in order to measure the participants' achievement goal orientations, and Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) to measure the participants' frequency of metacognitive reading strategy used. The findings revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between mastery-approach goal orientation and using metacognitive reading strategies. Moreover, there was a significant different between male and female participants in their achievement goals; females have higher scores in their achievement goals. Another example is a study conducted by Zafarmand, Ghanizadeh, and Akbari (2014) to find the relationship between EFL learners' goal orientation, metacognitive awareness, and self-efficacy in a single framework. The results demonstrated that among goal orientations, mastery goal is a positive and significant predictor of metacognitive awareness. Furthermore, it was found that metacognitive awareness plays a positive and significant role in self-efficacy.

Saleemee, Bagherpoor, and Adib in 2008 investigated the influence of teachers' behavior on the students' self-regulation. Based upon the data collected from two hundred female students, they suggested that there is a significant positive correlation between students' attention to discipline and teachers' sincere relationship. Also, it has been found that a positive significant relationship is between teachers' effort in fully explaining educational material to students and students' self-regulation.

Many studies have shown the relationship between self-regulatory strategies and productive skills in second language. For example, Ghonsooly and Elahi Shirvan in 2010 conducted a research on one hundred university students. The result indicated a significantly positive relationship of EFL learners' motivational self-regulatory strategies and both their L2 reading and L2 writing achievement. Also, there was a significant and positive relationship between motivational self-regulatory strategies and use of language learning strategies among EFL learners. In a study on EFL teachers, Ghonsooly and Ghanizadeh (2013) reported that EFL teachers' self-regulatory skills better equip them with positive beliefs about their professional capabilities. It has also been found that internal and controllable attributions positively predict teachers' self-regulatory skills (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014).

The differing views on the importance of external factors reflect the prolonged academic debate on the cognitive essence of the individual to determine what he or she learns. The influence of external factors is also important for researchers involved in language issues for facilitating language acquisition (Burr, 1995). One of the well cited accounts of contextual links to linguistic knowledge and language achievement is the interaction of eight factors for establishing a communicative context (Paige et al., 2002). These factors include: setting, participants, purpose, act, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction and interpretation, and genre. It is also contended that setting acts as an umbrella rudiment subsuming other factors. The purpose of the present study is finding the differences between self-regulatory skills of English language learners in two settings of language learning, namely, institutes and universities and their effects on language achievement.

METHOD

Participants

Two different samples participated in the present study. The first sample comprised 155 EFL students studying in language institutes. They were 40 boys and 115 girls. Their age varied from 13 to 28. The second sample included EFL learners at universities. They were 53 girls whose age varied from 20 to 30.

Instruments

Self-Regulating Trait (SRT) questionnaire was used to determine the EFL students' self-regulatory strategies. This questionnaire was designed by O'Neil et al. (1998). It consists of 32 Likert-scale questions ranging from almost never, to sometimes, often, and almost always. The scale seeks to measure metacognition and motivation dimensions. Each dimension comprises two sub-scales. Meta-cognition covers the constructs of planning and self-monitoring, and motivation contains effort and self-efficacy. The four scales are measured by 4 Likert-type items each. The following table depicts the subscales of the SRT. According to Herl et al. (1999), the reliability and validity of the scale have been verified in multiple studies.

Table 1. The Subscales of SRT along with the Corresponding Descriptions

Factor		Definition	Items
Metacognition	Planning	The extent to which one has an assigned or self-directed goal and a plan to achieve the goal.	1-5-9-13-17-21-25-29
	Self-monitoring	The extent to which one needs a self-checking mechanism to monitor goal achievement.	2-6-10-14-18-22-26-30
Motivation	Effort	The extent to which one works hard on a task.	3-7-11-15-19-23-27-31
	Self-efficacy	The extent to which one has confidence in being able to accomplish a particular task.	4-8-12-16-20-24-28-32

Procedure

The study was undertaken in 7 private language institutes (GLI, two branches of Rashed, Kish, Azaran, Jahade Daneshgahi, and Kish air) and a university in Mashhad (Imam Reza International University), Iran. Convenience sampling was used to collect data and all the participants kindly accepted to take part in the current study. The researchers explained the purpose of completing the questionnaire for the participants and asked them not to write their names. The data collection was done between November and December 2015.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of self-regulation and its corresponding subscales (planning, self-monitoring, effort, and self-efficacy). According to the table, self-regulation has mean value of about 94 and standard deviation of 14. In our sample, the maximum mean score of self-regulation equals 120 and the minimum is 56. Among the subscales of self-efficacy, effort obtained the highest mean (M=23.83, SD=4.50) while planning obtains the lowest mean (M=17.00, SD= 3.30).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-regulation and its Subscales

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Planning	208	8.00	24.00	17.0000	3.30422
Self-monitoring	208	12.00	32.00	23.6442	3.98043
Effort	208	10.00	32.00	23.8317	4.50609
Self-efficacy	208	9.00	32.00	24.1923	4.29262
Self-regulation	208	56.00	120.00	88.6683	13.46029

To explore the relationship between GPA, and the subscale of self-regulation, the Pearson Product Moment correlation was applied to the data. The results presented in table 3 revealed that GPA is positively associated with self-regulation and its comprising factors with planning and self-efficacy having the highest correlations.

Table 3. The Correlation Coefficients between GPA and Self-regulation and its Corresponding Factors

	Planning	Self-monitoring	Effort	Self-efficacy	Self-regulation
GPA	.232**	.203*	.219**	.220**	.217**

**Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

To examine whether there is any significant difference between university and institute students regarding the subscale of their self-regulation, an independent samples *t*-test was run. As Table 4 presents, the mean scores showed some differences between university and institute students concerning their self-regulation and its comprising factors.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-regulation and its Subscales in the Two Contexts

	Context	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Planning	university	53	16.6792	3.04942	.41887
	institute	155	17.1097	3.38938	.27224
Self-monitoring	university	53	23.9057	3.37561	.46368
	institute	155	23.5548	4.17342	.33522
Effort	university	53	23.1887	4.33703	.59574
	institute	155	24.0516	4.55528	.36589
Self-efficacy	university	53	23.6604	3.82775	.52578
	institute	155	24.3742	4.43737	.35642
Self-regulation	university	155	95.393	14.654	1.799
	institute	53	93.434	13.030	1.707

To see if these observed differences are significant statistically, independent samples *t*-tests were applied to the data. The results of *t*-test indicated that there are not any significant differences among university and institutes students regarding the self-regulation and its four subscales.

Table 5. The Results of Independent Samples T-test for Determining Differences between the two Settings

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Planning	Equal variances	-.818	206	.414	-.43043	.52619
	Not equal variances	-.862	99.232	.391	-.43043	.49957
Self-monitoring	Equal variances	.553	206	.581	.35082	.63444
	Not equal variances	.613	110.381	.541	.35082	.57216
Effort	Equal variances	-1.205	206	.230	-.86293	.71623
	Not equal variances	-1.234	94.108	.220	-.86293	.69913
Self-efficacy	Equal variances	-1.045	206	.297	-.71382	.68289
	Not equal variances	-1.124	103.398	.264	-.71382	.63520
Self-regulation	Equal variances	.863	206	.389	1.959	2.269
	Not equal variances	.942	100.305	.363	1.659	2.143

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study sought to find the differences between self-regulatory skills of English language learners' in institutes and universities. It also examined the impact of self-regulation on language achievement. It was found that students' language achievement had positive and significant correlations with self-regulation with planning and self-efficacy having the highest associations. However, there were no significant differences between university and institute students concerning their self-regulation and its comprising factors. The above finding, to some extent, is in line with previous research. For example, Ghanizade and Mirzaee (2012) suggested that there was a positive relationship between students' language achievement and their self-regulation. Moreover, they reported that learners' self-regulation can predict 53% of the language achievement. In 2015, Ghanizadeh and Alishahi carried out a research to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of classroom activities, self-regulatory skills and language achievement. It has been reported that students' language achievement is positively associated with self-regulation. Also, there was a positive correlation between joy and interest, which are parts of perceptions of class activity, and students' language achievement. It implies that enjoyable and interesting class atmosphere can help students learn better and become self-regulated learners.

Zimmerman (2000) proposed a self- regulation training model which was effective in increasing learners' self-regulation strategies and also their academic language achievement. Self-regulated learning includes students' metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and modifying their cognition (e.g., Brown, Bransford, Campione, & Ferrara, 1983; Corno, 1986; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986, 1988). Recent studies indicated that learners who are aware of their metacognition or are metacognitively aware perform better than unaware learners. Individuals high in metacognitive awareness are skilled at monitoring their progress towards goals, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and adjusting their learning strategies achieve favorable outcomes (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Young and Fry (2008) examined the relationship between metacognitive awareness and academic achievement in college students. Correlations were found between the metacognitive awareness and cumulative GPA as well as end-of-course grades. Ames (1992) pointed to perceptions of class activities and their effects on goal orientations, and mastery goals which could result in self-regulating learning and other academic performances. In other words, different classroom situations may effect on self-regulation and language performance.

Self-regulation has often been linked to learning strategies of students (Zimmerman,2002). Learning strategies or the tactics students may employ for negotiating various academic tasks might affect student's learning and performance outcomes. The strategies that students use, particularly self-regulatory strategies, and concentration which is the ability to maintain attention on academic tasks require self-monitoring. Research on college learning has focused on the strategies such as note-taking (Peverly, Brobst, Graham, & Shaw, 2003) and organizing and time management (Lahmers & Zulauf, 2000). Teachers can make students more self-regulated by finding

the areas they may have weakness for learning strategically like taking notes or managing the time and make them aware of their weakpoints. Students may also be able to monitor themselves better by redirecting attention and eliminating interfering thoughts to be more self-regulated.

The ability to self-regulate is important for students at any level. Based on previous work (Zimmerman, 2000), it has been implied that everyone is capable of self-regulation to an extent. What really differs between people is the quality and quantity of their self-regulatory processes. Enviromental structuring could influence the processes. Some studies demonstrate that college students are effective self-regulators, while other studies indicate they are not (Peverly, Brobst, Graham, & Shaw, 2003). In this study, there were no significant differences between universities and institutes concerning the self-regulation. In fact, the institutes and universities are so similar to each other in providing a psychological context which can impress learners' self-regulation. However, it is assumed that there are differences between those who use self-regulatory strategies and those who do not.

The result of the study indicated that there was a positive significant association between students' planning, self-efficacy, and their language achievement. It implies if students have plan for their learning and also believe that they are able to complete the tasks for getting their goals, they can achieve the language learning goals more effectively. To reach this end, teachers can play important role. They may help students in their planning for their learning and motivating them to believe in their abilities. They can provide the situation of the class more enjoyable and interesting to increase student's self-regulation. Becoming aware of what happens in one's mind and one's thinking process may help individuals to have more control over their cognitive process and lead toward being more effective in achieving their academic goals.

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