



Teacher differences in promoting students' self-regulated learning: Exploring the role of student characteristics

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ABSTRACT

Research has repeatedly illustrated the positive effects of self-regulated learning (SRL) on students' intrinsic motivation and academic performance. Teachers are crucial actors in providing all students with equal opportunities to develop SRL skills. However, various factors, such as student characteristics, may affect teachers' support of students' SRL. This study examined primary school teachers' (N = 127) perceptions regarding the role of student characteristics in their promotion of SRL. It was found that while teachers recounted experiencing the influence of multiple student characteristics, teachers differed in their instructional responses. Subsequently, the results suggested that teacher beliefs, knowledge of SRL, and attributional styles mediate the potential association of student characteristics alongside teachers' SRL support. The study concludes by acknowledging the role of student characteristics in understanding teachers' varying levels of SRL promotion. In addition, teachers' susceptibility and response to diverse student characteristics may overshadow actual student SRL needs, limiting student growth opportunities.

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1. Introduction

Eliminating the impact of student characteristics, such as the socio-economic and ethnic background, on academic performance remains a major global challenge (Jacobs & Rea, 2011; OECD, 2010). Given the unambiguous relationship between students' self-regulated learning (SRL) and their academic motivation and performance (Cleary & Platten, 2013; Dignath & Büttner, 2008), at-risk students are therefore likely to benefit from increased levels of SRL skills. At-risk students often appear more disengaged from classroom activities, frequently displaying lower amounts of intrinsic motivation and capacity to self-regulate (Bembenuy, 2007; Desoete, 2009; Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002; Major, Martinussen, & Wiener, 2013). Enabling children to develop SRL skills early through positive feedback loops stands to counteract negative feedback systems. The latter hamper children with limited self-regulatory capacities in improving their SRL skills, resulting not only in increases between students' SRL gaps but also in achievement disparity, which continues to grow year upon year (Blair & Diamond, 2008).

Thus far, SRL-related research has focused on theoretical conceptualization (e.g., Zimmerman, 2002), SRL development in learners (e.g., Veenman & Spaans, 2005), and SRL instruction in teaching practice (e.g., Perry, Phillips, & Dowler, 2004). More recently, prominent

researchers have called for empirical studies to explain differences in teachers' SRL promotion by identifying crucial contextual influences (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2006; Muijs et al., 2014).

Influences on SRL promotion may descend from teacher, school, student, parent, and policy level (Hattie, 2009; Lau, 2013; Martinez-Pons, 2002). Derived from a necessity to provide all children with equal access to SRL development opportunities, the current study investigates teachers' personal beliefs about the role of student characteristics in their instructional decisions regarding SRL. Hence, the study examines teachers' so-called espoused theories, which reflect the theories people believe to underpin their behavior (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Gaining clarity on teachers' self-perceptions of classroom processes proves crucial to comprehending why and how teachers organize (SRL-oriented) instructional practice (McCardle & Hadwin, 2015; Nespor, 1987).

2. Conceptual framework

The SRL framework can be perceived as an umbrella concept overarching multiple strategies that make learners more effective. Self-regulated learners "set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453).

Amidst the research documenting teachers' role in fostering students' SRL (e.g., Dignath, Büttner, & Langfeldt, 2008; Dignath & Büttner, 2008; Ferreira, Simão, & da Silva, 2015), teachers' assessment skills prove critical in informing their SRL promotion, respective of

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individual student needs (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004). Nevertheless, teachers' subjective beliefs may interfere with their assessment (Friedrich, Jonkmann, Nagengast, Schmitz, & Trautwein, 2013; Malle & Pearce, 2001).

Given the potential implications towards SRL development, it is relevant to explore teachers' beliefs in the influences of student characteristics on their SRL-promoting practices (Lau, 2013). Fig. 1 further illustrates this need while highlighting the current study's context, approach, and primary goal. The dashed box marks the current study's focus.

Teacher differences and respective self-reported teacher insights on student characteristics may help explain differences in the way teachers approach, are disposed to, and ultimately stimulate SRL in the classroom (Karabenick & Zusho, 2015).

2.1. Teacher differences in SRL promotion

Most researchers argue that teachers vary, prioritizing their focus and facilitation on particular SRL components or phases (Donker, de Boer, Kostons, Dignath van Ewijk, & van der Werf, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2015; Moos & Ringdal, 2012; Spruce & Bol, 2015). Moreover, while student-centered and constructivist classroom practices are increasing (OECD, 2009), direct instruction of effective SRL strategies remains scarce (Kistner et al., 2010; Spruce & Bol, 2015). Thus, although primary school teachers feel positive about developing SRL (Dignath-van Ewijk & van der Werf, 2012; Spruce & Bol, 2015; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000), several obstacles towards realization can be observed within the literature (Lau, 2013; Lombaerts, Engels, & Van Braak, 2009).

Research highlights that teacher beliefs, knowledge, and prior learning and teaching experiences are considered to influence SRL promoting practices (Lau, 2013; Lombaerts, Engels, & Vanderfaeillie, 2007; Moos & Ringdal, 2012; Spruce & Bol, 2015). Moreover, although gender was not found to explain differences in SRL promotion (e.g., Klug, Krause, Schober, Finsterwald, & Spiel, 2014; Peeters, De Backer, Kindekens, Jacquet, & Lombaerts, 2013), age effects have been questioned, with older teachers found less likely to support students' SRL (e.g., Klug et al., 2014; Peeters, De Backer, Kindekens, Jacquet, & Lombaerts, 2015).

Conclusively, teacher dimensions and instructional behaviors may be considered contributing factors to student differences in the development and application of SRL strategies (Karabenick & Zusho, 2015).

2.2. Student differences in SRL

Individual student characteristics may also affect teachers' response and use of SRL promotion strategies, which in turn has several implications for consequent SRL growth and opportunities. First, students' capacities to self-regulate develop over time; hence, teachers adapt accordingly by gradually integrating SRL in primary education (Lombaerts et al., 2007). Beyond age, gender difference findings are inconsistent (e.g., Schnell, Ringeisen, Raufelder, & Rohrmann, 2015; Veenman, Hesselink, Sleenwaegen, Liem, & Van Haaren, 2014), with possible interaction of gender and age in relation to learners' development of metacognition (Veenman et al., 2014).

Secondly, SRL differences have been detected regarding students' socio-economic and ethnic background. For example, although kindergarten and 2nd grade students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds showed comparable levels of motivation, they displayed more difficulties in regulating their task- and goal-oriented attention, in comparison to their more advantaged peers (Howse, Lange, Farran, & Boyles, 2003).

Thirdly, gifted students are often found to have higher academic self-efficacy and to apply more high-level SRL strategies, such as reviewing notes and seeking peer assistance (Greene, Moos, Azevedo, & Winters, 2008; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). However, self-regulation skills promotion may help low-achieving students develop strategies to compensate for their lower cognitive abilities (Roebbers, Krebs, & Roderer, 2014; Veenman, Wilhelm, & Beishuizen, 2004; Zuffianò et al., 2013). Metacognition, motivation, and self-regulation have consistently been found to contribute more towards academic achievement than does intelligence (Kriegbaum, Jansen, & Spinath, 2014; Steinmayr, Bipp, & Spinath, 2011; Veenman & Spaans, 2005).

Fourthly, students with a learning disorder (LD) or displaying behavioral problems often lack effective SRL strategies. LD students regularly display low self-efficacy beliefs to self-regulate (Klassen, 2010; Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015) and are more often performance goal-oriented than mastery goal-orientated (Baird, Scott, Dearing, & Hamill, 2009). Additionally, female students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder were shown more likely to display lack of confidence in SRL. Combined with a possible lack of academic skills, students' efforts to actually engage in SRL are limited, which in turn reinforces their academic disadvantage (Major et al., 2013).

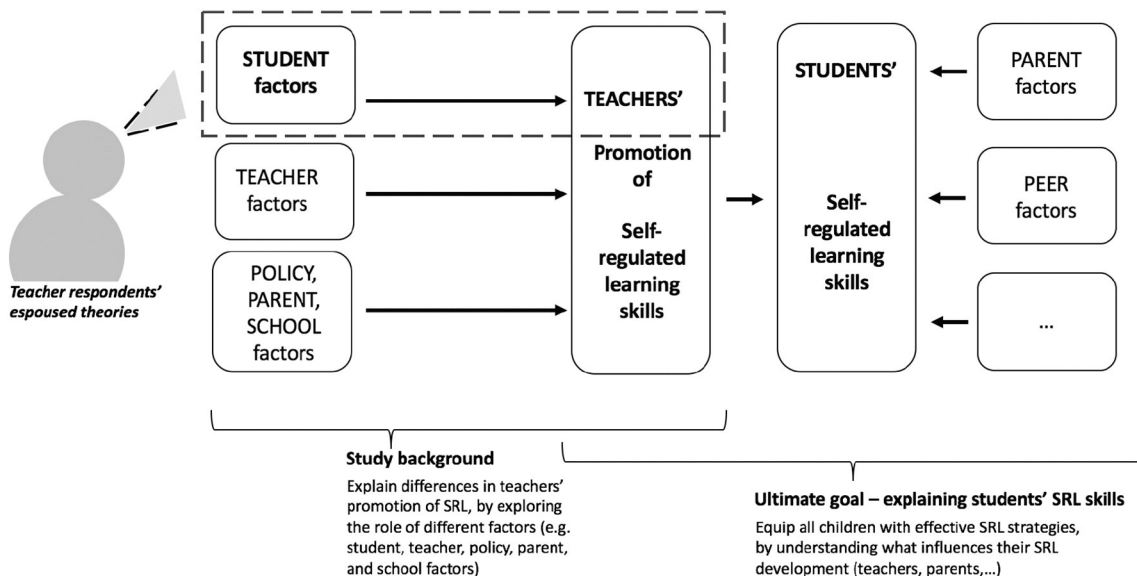


Fig. 1. Conceptual background of the study.

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