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SELF REGULATION AND CULTURAL ORIENTATION ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

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Abstract

Correlated in this study were the variables of self regulation, cultural orientation and academic achievement of university students on distance education in Kampala, Uganda. To test the null hypotheses, the ex post facto, descriptive comparative and descriptive correlation designs were employed. Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions, means, t-test, analysis of variance and Chi-Square. There was no significant difference in the extent of self regulation, degree of cultural orientation and level of academic achievement between gender, type of university and among nationalities thus the null hypotheses were accepted; there was a significant correlation between the extent of self regulation and degree of cultural orientation on the level of academic achievement, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. In conclusion, the culture fit theory of Kanungo and Jaerger (1990) and its elaboration by Aisha (2007) were validated and proven true through the findings of this study while self regulation and cultural orientation were proven predictors to academic achievement. The recommendations based on the findings of this study addressed to the institutions understudy, to the distance learners and distance education facilitators were in these areas: proactive stance on gender sensitivity, managing cross cultural variations; enhancing learner's autonomy, cultural orientation and academic achievement.

Introduction

Distance learning students often are victims of poor performance as compared to the fulltime students. Not all learners are able or willing to handle the self autonomy burden, and this results in dropping out and silently struggling to self regulate (Aisha, 2007). Cross cultural variations are slightly addressed in distance education. Studies (Young, 1996; Candy, 1990; Schunk, 2005; Garrison, 1997), as noted by Aisha (2007), had been carried out on distance learning students mainly in Europe, America and Asia, neglecting Africa. Many of them have looked at self regulation as one of the ways of improving performance of distance learning students. But there was need to establish this aspect in Africa, in Uganda, and Kampala in particular, where there is an increase in demand for distance education.

Review of Related Literature

Self Regulation

Garrison (1997) criticizes the literature of self directed learning in adult education because it nearly focuses on external management (task control) of the learning process, but lacks a more comprehensive model by additionally including the cognitive (cognitive responsibility) and psychological (motivational) dimensions. For better understanding of the last two dimensions, he suggested referring to the psychological literature on self regulation. The concept of self-regulation grew out of cognitive psychology where as learner autonomy and self directed learning were established in adult education and humanistic psychology (Garrison, 1997). In fact, self regulation was the result of the interest of learning and motivational researchers in self directed learning (Ridgeley, Schutz and Glanz, 1992).

The simplest definition of self-regulation is exercising control over oneself to bring the self in line with preferred standards. Also, the term self-regulation (process of taking control of and evaluating one's own learning and behavior) can be used to describe learning that is guided by metacognition (thinking about one's thinking), *strategic action* (planning, monitoring, and evaluating personal progress against a standard), and *motivation to learn* (Butler and Winne, 1995; Winne and Perry, 2000; Perry, Phillips, and Hutchinson, 2006; Zimmerman, 1990; Boekaerts and Corno, 2005). Self-regulated learning (SRL) as the three words imply, emphasizes autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise and self-improvement (Paris and Paris 2001). In particular, self-regulated learners are cognizant of their academic strengths and weaknesses, and they have a repertoire of strategies they appropriately apply to tackle the day-to-day challenges of academic tasks. These learners hold incremental beliefs about intelligence (as opposed to entity, or fixed views of intelligence) and attribute their successes or failures to

factors (e.g., effort expended on a task, effective use of strategies) within their control (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 2002).

Academic Achievement

Whoever enrolls for an academic course hopes to get academic achievement at the end of the course (Aisha, 2007). An academic achievement is something one does or achieves at school, college or university in class, in a laboratory, library or field work. It does not include sport or music. An academic achievement, such as graduating 1st in one's class, is sometimes a purely quantitative matter, while having the findings of lengthy, comprehensive research published by a recognized journal, is also a notable academic achievement. Being named head/chairman of a particular department at a university is both a professional and an academic achievement.

In educational institutions, success is measured by academic performance, or how well a student meets standards set out by the institution. In an effort to learn how to increase academic performance of students, teachers have tried to improve their presentation of the course material by adding interactive media tools to increase academic motivation (Hammand, 2011). But some of the other ways to improve performance is through presenting difficult and challenging tasks to students. This will help them to concentrate a lot in order to overcome the challenging tasks, and eventually performance will be enhanced. Visual guides, programmed learning guide, text books, among others should be in place for learner's performance to be improved (Kamya, 2011). Academic achievement or (academic) performance is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals. Academic achievement is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts (Ward, Stoker and Murray-Ward,1996). In California, the achievement of schools is measured by the Academic Performance Index. Individual differences in academic performance have been linked to differences in intelligence and personality (Von-Stumm, Benedikt; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Students with higher mental ability as demonstrated by IQ tests (quick learners) and those who are higher in conscientiousness (linked to effort and achievement motivation) tend to achieve highly in academic settings. A recent meta-analysis suggested that mental curiosity (as measured by typical intellectual engagement) has an important influence on academic achievement in addition to intelligence and conscientiousness (Von-Stumm, Benedikt; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). However, in this study, academic achievement was limited to good performance of distance learning students in terms of the learners' self evaluation and grade point averages.

Self-Regulation and Academic Achievement of Students on Distance Education

Young (1996) provides evidence suggesting that the learners with low self regulation or self direction perform poorly when given control over their learning in relation to choice, sequence and pace of learning events (structural component of transactional distance), where as their counterparts with high levels of self direction or self regulation performed equally well regardless of the type of control given. Most teachers are frustrated by their unmotivated students. What they may not know is how important the connection is between student motivation and self determination (Mc Combs, 2007). Research has shown that motivation is related to whether or not students have opportunities to be autonomous and to make important academic choices. Having choices allows them to feel that they have control or ownership over their own learning. This is very important for distance learning education, where much control is expected to be in hands of the learners, other than the teachers (instructors).

Researchers studying student engagement, motivation and self-regulated learning generally agree that these connected concepts are important for learning and achieving success in school. From a theoretical perspective, this is supported by the self-determination theory of motivation advanced by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2002). This theory states that, if students can be supported in meeting their basic needs for competency, autonomy and relatedness in learning situations, they are more likely to develop into independent, self directed and lifelong learners. Studies highlight the relationship between self regulation and academic achievements (Duckworth, Akerman, Mac Gregor, Salter and Vorhous, 2009). Children and young people with more adaptive personal skills and learning resources are more likely to succeed academically. Although the size of the effect is considerably smaller than that associated with prior attainment, it exists independently of prior attainment and can be supported through appropriate policy and practice. Not all students are well placed to develop self regulation skills. Students who struggle to know whether a given strategy will be successful are likely to have difficulties in assessing whether further effort is worthwhile (Efklides, Papadaki, Papantoniou, and Kiosseoglou, 1999). Others adopt defensive approaches to learning (Paris and Newman, 1990), avoiding failure by procrastinating, choosing easy tasks or avoiding work altogether. But however, easy tasks cannot lead one to valuable success. It is harder tasks that yield valuable success and achievement.

There is little doubt that self-regulation has a positive effect on academic attainment, while also making a positive contribution to student behavior, discipline and self belief (Duckworth, et al, 2009). Although the effect is often small by comparison with the impact of socio-demographic characteristics, self regulation is amenable to support and intervention. One of the major benefits of self-regulation as a framework for learning is that it connects programmes that are focused on learning strategies and thinking skills with the wider well being agenda in schools. There is a growing body of research indicating that students who can self-regulate cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects of their academic functioning are more effective as learners (Soresi and Zimmerman, 2005). Also known as self-discipline, researchers describe self-regulation as the ability to consciously suppress or delay responses in order to work for a higher goal.

Null Hypotheses

The null hypotheses tested in this study contended on (i) no significant differences in the extent of self regulation, degree of cultural orientation and level of academic achievement between male and female students, among nationalities and between public and private university students under study; (ii) no significant correlations between the level of academic achievement and gender, nationality and university type; between the extent of self regulation and level of academic achievement of the university students involved in this study; and between the degree of cultural orientation and level of academic achievement of the university students involved in this study.

Methodology

Employing the ex post facto, descriptive comparative and descriptive correlation strategies, the data were collected using standardized questionnaires with the items on self regulation and cultural orientation. Using the Sloven's formula, a minimum sample size of 467 was attained, though 600 questionnaires were administered to the respondents where 513 of the questionnaires were retrieved. The purposive, systematic random sampling and simple random sampling were utilized to get the total target population of 1200, to select the 600 respondents out of the 1200, and finally to select the 467 (actual sample size) respondents from the retrieved 513 fully answered questionnaires. To test for reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test indicated that the questionnaires were reliable (for both self regulation and cultural orientation) at above 0.5 (.916 and .878 respectively). To test for validity of the two questionnaires (for both self regulation and cultural orientation), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy indicated that the questionnaires were valid at above 0.5 (.906 and .884 respectively). The data were analyzed using summary statistics such as means and ranks. The null hypotheses were analyzed using the t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-Square.

Findings

Extent of Self Regulation

Table 1: Summary on the Extent of Self Regulation

n=467

Constructs on Self Regulation	Average Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Planning	3.02	Satisfactory	1
Self Checking	3.00	Satisfactory	2
Effort	2.98	Satisfactory	3
Self Efficacy	2.95	Satisfactory	4
Help Seeking	2.93	Satisfactory	5
Time and Study Environment Management	2.93	Satisfactory	5
Overall Mean	**2.97**	**Satisfactory**	

Source: Primary Data, 2012

Legend

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Almost Always	Very Satisfactory
2.51-3.25	Some Times	Satisfactory
1.76-2.50	Often	Fair
1.00-1.75	Almost Never	Poor

Table 1 indicates that out of the six metacognitive aspects on self regulation, the following were dominant: planning with highest mean (3.02), while help seeking, time and study environment management with the lowest mean (2.93). Very evident in the summary table was the interpretation revealing only a satisfactory self regulation implying the need for room for improvement. Palinsac and Brown (1984) suggested the element of control for learner to stay on track. While Iran-Nejad and Chissom (1992) pointed out sources for self regulation such as these: (1) for the person to be conscious and strategic in regulating one self,(2) dynamic self regulation;(3) combination of person driven and unconscious self-regulated learning.

In planning, the learners should set goals, practice an evaluative task that mobilizes effect toward goal attainment (Bandura, 1991). Setting goals for one self has both practical and motivational advantages. As Wood and Bandura (1989) explain, goals provide one with a sense of psychological well being and accomplishment because they not only help to sustain effort, but provide a sense of purpose. In addition, they provide standards to measure one progress against. Goal setting and planning is determined by the task and the environmental features (Zimmerman, 1989). The literature suggests that specified and challenging goals results in better performance than easy and vague goals (Ridley, 1992). Hence, planning is a vital and key aspect to high academic achievement of the students.

Further, Knowles (1975) contended that, it is not good for self regulated learners to over rely on help seeking. He suggested that, self directed/regulated learners should engage in a process in which they take the initiative with or without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing and implementing long strategies and

evaluating learning outcomes. Moore (1972) confirms that, autonomous learners will turn to teachers for help temporarily surrendering their control over their learning process. On the other hand, there are qualitative differences noted by Zimmerman (2004) in help seeking between distance learners who persist and those who do not persist. Non completers rely more on face to face help, while completers try to adopt their help seeking behavior to the online environment. Hence, if there is poor use of online forums, it is most likely that the distance learning students will not complete their courses of study.

Level of Academic Achievement

Table 2: Level of Academic Achievement

n=467

Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) Range	Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
00-1.9	Unsatisfactory	9	1.9
2.0-2.9	Below Average	83	17.8
3.0-3.9	Average/Good	164	35.1
4.0-4.3	Very Good	160	34.3
4.4-5.0	Excellent	51	10.9
	Total	**467**	**100**

Source: Primary Data, 2012

Legend

CGPA	**Grade Range**	**Interpretation**
4.4-5.0	80-100	Excellent
4.0-4.3	70-79	Very Good
3.0-3.9	60-69	Average/Good
2.0-2.9	50-59	Below Average
0-1.9	0-49	Unsatisfactory

Illustrated in Table 2 is that most students' performance was average/good at 35.1%.This implies that most students were middle performers with 10.9% categorized as excellent, while 1.9% performed unsatisfactorily;34.3% achieved very good performance while 17.8% were below average. In educational institutions, success is measured by academic performance, or how well a student meets standards set by the institution. However, based on the data in Table 6, it is clear that a lot is still desired to improve. Hammand (2011) contended that in an effort to learn how to increase academic performance of students, teachers have tried to improve their presentation of the course material by adding interactive media tools to increase academic motivation. Some of the other ways to improve performance is through presenting difficult and challenging tasks to students. This will help them to concentrate in order to overcome the challenging tasks, and eventually performance will be enhanced. Visual guides, programmed learning guide, text books, among others should be in place for learner's performance to be improved (Kamya, 2011).

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Table 3: Extent of Self Regulation Between Gender

Level of Significance=0.05

Variable	Gender	Mean	t	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Extent of Self Regulation	Male	2.98	.391	.696	No significant difference	Accepted
	Female	2.96				

Generally, the consequent t-test results in table 3 showed that gender was not a variable that distinguished differences in self regulation. Deviations from the above findings such as according to Nolen-Hoeksema and Corte (2004), previous research has shown that there are some areas where gender differences in self regulation strategies are clear. One is in the styles of copying with negative emotions. Studies suggest that women are more likely to take a passive stance toward negative emotions and ruminating about them. This is associated with higher rates of depression. On the other hand, men have been shown to be more likely to use, and abuse alcohol. In the self regulation of health behaviors, important sex differences are evident in several ways. Gender was one of a number of factors contributing to the prediction of adherence to asthma treatment, with females more likely to adhere (Jessop and Rutter, 2003).

Table 4: Significant Differences in the Extent of Self Regulation among Nationalities
Level of Significance=0.05

Variable	Nation	Mean	F	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Extent of Self Regulation	Ugandan	2.96	1.305	.254	No significant difference	Accepted
	Kenyan	2.98				
	Tanzanian	3.08				
	Rwandese	3.03				
	Burundian	2.70				
	S.Sudanese	3.02				
	Others(Somalia,Somaliland,Ethiopia, Nigeria, Congo, Zanzibar)	2.77				

Irrespective of which nation a student came from, it did not have any effect on the extent of his/her self regulation. This in other words reflects that all students can have the same extent of self regulation without any significant influence by or from his or her nation of origin (nationality). Never the less, this is within the confines of this study only. In a study by Warren and Lloyd (2009) on Civil Society Organizations (CSO) self regulation, which was carried out in a global perspective, considering many countries world over, there were differences in the extent of self regulation, particularly patterns in civil society organization self-regulatory initiative types. The study explained the eight main types of CSO self regulatory initiative types, namely; codes of conduct and ethics, information service, working group, self assessment tool, award scheme, self certification, peer certification and 3rd party certification. In analyzing the countries and regions with the high levels of CSO self regulation, North America, the United States specifically, and to a lesser extent Canada, as well as Western Europe had the highest levels of CSO self regulatory initiatives globally, while the United States had by far the highest number of active initiatives (over 50) while the United Kingdom had over 20 initiatives with a notably smaller popular and CSO sector size. In this very study, it was established that CSO self regulation had emerged more slowly outside Western Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, but is nonetheless on the agenda in other regions. South Asia provided a mixed picture of CSO self regulation development. Self regulation of the CSO sector in Latin America had just begun to take root in some countries. There was generally a lot of information in this study on self regulation, though it concentrated on CSO's. It is clear that there are differences in the extent of self regulation in terms of regions and nations in the above study. Contrally to the findings of this study, nationality did not matter in terms of extent of self regulation of the university students under study.

Table 5: Significant Differences in the Extent of Self Regulation Between Public and Private University Students
Level of Significance=0.05

Variable	University Type	Mean	t	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Extent of Self Regulation	Public	2.95	.841	.401	No significant difference	Accepted
	Private	2.99				

Similar to nationality and gender as already seen in the previous tables on significant differences, Table 5 presents the findings of no significant differences in the extent of self regulation between public and private university students on distance education. This implies that the type of university did not play a distinguishing role in self regulation. Students of public and private universities then equally self regulate themselves, without much influence by their type of university. However, based on studies carried out, the type of school (public or private) determines the extent of self regulation. In a model study on the explanation of the Centralized High School Entrance Examinations in Turkey, carried out by Altun and Canoa (2011), whose main objective was to determine the predictive power of students self-efficacy perceptions, metacognitive self regulation skills course test points, school achievement points and school behavior points on their High School Entrance Examination (SBS) scores, one of the other targets was to establish the influence of school type on such self regulation. In the findings, predicting the SBS score by the metacognitive self regulation ability, there were differences in terms of school type (i.e. public and private). Metacognitive self-regulation strategy involved the individuals' awareness on one's own level of knowledge, one's ability to control and to do the necessary adjustments. In Altun and Canoa's findings, while students in public schools have the chance to take responsibility for their learning process and to enhance this ability, the students in the private schools may underdevelop this responsibility and awareness because of the extreme support of their parents (2011). In another study by Mc Whaw and Abham (2001), it was found out that the students who receive high levels of attention for their expected performance in the examination, metacognitive self-regulation strategies were used more. In case of failure in the SBS, the students from private schools in this study still have the chance to enroll in a good

school and this fact may be a factor on the result that the metacognitive self regulation does not have a significant effect on SBS scores for them. The above are evidences to prove that the school type had an impact on the extent of self regulation. While in this study, the type of university did not bring about varying extents of self regulations, given the fact that students in private institutions may regulate themselves more due to the circumstances present in the private institutions.

Table 6: Correlation Between the Extent of Self Regulation and Degree of Cultural Orientation on the Level of Academic Achievement

Level of Significance=0.05

Independent Variables	Level of Academic Achievement (CGPA Range)	Mean	F	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on Ho
Extent of Self Regulation	00-1.9	2.64	5.229	.000	Significant difference	Rejected
	2.0-2.9	2.83				
	3.0-3.9	2.94				
	4.0-4.3	3.04				
	4.4-5.0	3.09				

Evidently illustrated in Table 6 were these findings: significant correlation in terms of the extent of self regulation and the level of academic achievement. Given the fact that the level of academic achievement was measured in terms of Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) range, the One Way-ANOVA was used instead of the Pearson's Linear Correlation Coefficient. The test revealed a significant correlation between the extent of self regulation and level of academic achievement, at the level of significance of 0.05. These results implied that the extent of self regulation affected students' level of academic achievement. In agreement to the findings of this study, studies highlight the relationship between self regulation and academic achievements (Duckworth, Akerman, Mac Gregor, Salter and Vorhous, 2009). Children and young people with more adaptive personal skills and learning resources are more likely to succeed academically. Although the size of the effect is considerably smaller than that associated with prior attainment, it exists independently of prior attainment and can be supported through appropriate policy and practice. Not all students are well placed to develop self regulation skills. Students who struggle to know whether a given strategy will be successful are likely to have difficulties in assessing whether further effort is worthwhile (Efklides, Papadaki, Papantoniou, and Kiosseoglou, 1999). Others adopt defensive approaches to learning (Paris and Newman, 1990), avoiding failure by procrastinating, choosing easy tasks or avoiding work altogether. But however, easy tasks cannot lead one to valuable success. It is harder tasks that yield valuable success and achievement. There is little doubt that self-regulation has a positive effect on academic attainment, while also making a positive contribution to student behavior, discipline and self belief (Duckworth, et.al, 2009). Although the effect is often small by comparison with the impact of socio-demographic characteristics, self regulation is amenable to support and intervention. One of the major benefits of self-regulation as a framework for learning is that it connects programmes that are focused on learning strategies and thinking skills with the wider well being agenda in schools.

Conclusions

There was no significant difference in the extent of self regulation between gender, among nationalities and type of university, hence leading to acceptance of the null hypothesis. On the other hand, there was a significant correlation between the extent of self regulation and level of academic achievement, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis of no significant correlation. The culture fit theory of Kanungo and Jaerger (1990) was validated and proven true in view of the findings of this study. Looking at the new information generated from the findings, female and male students can equally regulate themselves, regardless of the nationality and type of university, students on distance education can equally regulate themselves, self regulation among distance learners can be measured in terms of these constructs: planning, self checking, effort, self efficacy, time and study environment management, the extent of self regulation is an influencing factor to the level of academic achievement of distance learners understudy.

Recommendations

For the distance learners to achieve high academic achievement through proper blending of one's commitment to his/her course with self regulation, they should observe the following:

Planning: figure out academic goals, understand the goal of a course assignment, carefully plan course of action for academic study, plan well the time for academic work. **Self checking:** develop self-inquiry as a strategy to stay on course, check academic work most often and correct errors, keep track on progress and how much time is left to complete. **Effort:** consider hard work as a source of success, ensure much effort not to lag behind in course activities, do not be discouraged and do not give up, be persistent with the course. **Self efficacy:** make good use of study time, feel good and exercise control over the course of study, have a good reading culture, stick to reading schedule and do not allow any interference on this, select a conducive place to study. **Help seeking:** identify students in class for help, always ask for help when needed, clarify from the facilitator any unclear concepts, use on line forums to ask for help from other students. **Time and study**

environment management: manage time and environment well for course of study and adjust well to time management alteration. In addition to the above, take notes, use available learning resources, finish homework assignments before deadlines, use wisely the library, organize school work effectively, arrange a study area at home which has no distractions, motivate oneself to do schoolwork and participate in class discussions. Be consistent with own standards as deviation from this means a failure in self regulation. Educators of distance learners should assist the learners to keep up with self regulation through literacy instruction (reciprocal teaching, open-ended tasks, project based learning); cognitive engagement and self-assessment.

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