

# TEACHER'S VIEWS ON CHALLENGES WITH THE FOSTERING OF SELF-REGULATED LEARNING SKILLS AND SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges teachers experience with the fostering of self-regulated learning skills in intermediate phase learners as well as how the school management teams support them in their attempts to develop and enhance self-regulated learning skills. Self-regulated learning skills have become increasingly crucial in the 21st century, both within education and beyond, as it equips learners with knowledge and skills that improve academic performance and lifelong learning. In curriculum meetings with departmental officials and school management teams, the focus invariably centers on identifying methods to enhance outcomes and mitigate learner underperformance. Within these deliberations, the proposed solutions consistently revolve around actions by teachers, such as increasing classwork, homework assignments, and offering additional classes. The strategy of fostering learners' self-regulated learning skills is never proposed to improve academic achievement and pass rates. Teachers' pivotal role in fostering self-regulated learning skills is hindered by various factors. Without effective engagement from teachers and the entire school community in cultivating these skills from primary education onwards, learners will persist in struggling throughout their academic journey, unable to meet the evolving demands of the world. School management teams have an impact on teacher control, power and educational initiatives, resources and innovations. Therefore, support from school power structures such as principals and heads of departments in the development of self-regulated learning needs to be explored. The qualitative study is located within an interpretivist philosophical orientation to enable the researchers to explore a real-life situation and the experiences teachers encounter in their daily teaching and learning contexts. Fifteen participants from three primary schools were conveniently and purposively sampled to participate in the study. Data was collected through single semi-structured interviews with each participant. Data was analysed inductively through a thematic approach. The findings revealed that participants' beliefs about their roles in the holistic development of learners and the aims of teaching and learning are linked to their positive beliefs about the value of self-regulated learning skills. Participants face challenges including inadequate pedagogical content knowledge to develop some self-regulated learning skills, overcrowding, time constraints, limited resources, and lack of parental involvement. They lack professional development and training from school management to enhance their ability to foster self-regulated learning skills. Their only support comes in the form of documents like textbooks and teaching plans from the Department of Basic Education.

**Keywords:** *Self-regulated learning, teachers, school management teams, professional development.*

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## 1. Introduction

Zimmerman and Moylan's (2009) cyclical model of self-regulated learning (SRL) highlights the self-regulated learning skills self-regulated learners demonstrate and the skills teachers should develop for learners to function effectively in the twenty-first century. Examples of these skills include, goalsetting, strategic planning of learning strategies, resources, and time management to complete learning tasks successfully (Loeng, 2020). SRL skills have become increasingly crucial in the 21st century, both within education and beyond, as it equips learners with knowledge and skills that improve academic performance and lifelong learning (Bandura, 2015). Vandeveld, Vandebussche and Van Keer (2012, p. 1563) report that SRL is strongly influenced by classroom practices and teachers are considered the most important source from which learners can learn how to create learning environments that foster SRL. Geduld (2017) also avers that while teachers play a crucial role in promoting SRL, several external

factors hamper their efforts to develop SRL skills in learners. Likewise Van der Velde et al. (2012), reported that a lack of time, work pressure and diversity among learners as prevalent challenges for teachers to foster SRL skills. Many teachers in schools of poor communities feel that the general education and development of learners' rests solely on their shoulders (Geduld, 2017).

Wolters and Hussain, (2015) argue that the development of SRL skills must not be viewed as solely a classroom topic or the teacher's responsibility. A school-wide approach is needed to stimulate and develop SRL skills in learners. School management teams (SMT's) such as principals and head of departments significantly influences teacher authority and educational innovations and should therefore support teachers with the development of twenty first century skills such as SRL skills. Teachers thus need continuous support from the SMT's and the Department of Education for them to be self-directed and to develop SRL skills in their learners. This implies that school management teams must create school environments conducive for effective teaching and learning that enhance the development of SRL skills (Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

This study explored the challenges teachers experience as well as the support, if any, from SMT's with development of SRL skills in the intermediate phase. In the South African schooling system, the intermediate phase includes Grades 4, 5 and 6 in a primary school. In this phase teachers are required to use different teaching modalities to accommodate learners and to ensure that they adapt to the transition from the Foundation Phase. The intermediate phase is a crucial phase, even more so for certain mother tongue groupings that are required to make transition to learn and be taught in English. Learners' abilities in effective reading, writing, and speaking the language of instruction in a manner which facilitate their own learning and knowledge base are vital aspects to be considered in creating awareness amongst teachers about the development of SRL skills.

Teachers' pivotal role in fostering SRL skills is hindered by various factors. Without effective engagement from teachers and the entire school community in cultivating these skills from primary education onwards, learners will persist in struggling throughout their academic journey, unable to meet the evolving demands of the world.

Against this context the following two research questions guided this study: (a) What challenges do intermediate phase teachers experience with the fostering of self-regulated learning skills? and (b) What support, if any, do intermediate phase teachers receive from the school management teams to develop self-regulated learning skills of learners?

## 2. Literature review

Persico, Milligan and Littlejohn (2015) report that the changing teaching and learning environment, teachers' lack of knowledge of SRL, workload, time and overcrowded classes, teachers' lack of self- efficacy beliefs, lack of collaboration between learners, teachers and parents as the challenges teachers face in attending to individual learners' SRL skills in class daily. Kartika and Maina (2017) also found that teachers facing difficulties with the development of SRL skills often contend with heavy workplace demands like large workloads and overcrowded classes. These conditions impede teachers' ability to manage their workload while fostering SRL skills in class. Additionally, intermediate phase teachers teach multiple subjects, each requiring individual planning due to varying content knowledge. These challenges necessitate committed teachers who can adapt teaching strategies and self-regulation techniques to different subjects. Overcrowded intermediate phase classes exacerbate this issue, hindering teachers from addressing individual learner needs effectively.

Another challenge found by Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014) is many teachers' lack of pedagogical content knowledge to develop SRL skills. Triquet, Peeters and Lombarts (2017) indicate that teaching and learning environments are dynamic and evolve, becoming more complex and causing more challenges for teachers in general. Therefore, the authors maintain that teachers need to improve their own SRL skills continuously so that they will be able to manage and overcome the challenges they encounter in class and address the diverse and individual needs of their learners. Hasanoglu and Girmen (2014) highlights a significant challenge faced by teachers: the lack of time and training to support learners with special needs and develop their self-regulated learning (SRL) skills. Equipping teachers with SRL knowledge enables them to effectively assist learners with special needs, thereby enhancing their academic abilities and contributing to the national pass rate.

Given the challenges teachers face in attending to individual learners' SRL skills on a daily basis, particularly regarding the changing teaching and learning environment, teachers' lack of knowledge of SRL, and the need for continuous professional development, the roles and responsibilities of the School Management Team (SMT) in supporting teachers become increasingly vital.

The roles and responsibilities of the School Management Team (SMT) are outlined in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (Department of Basic Education, 2016). According

to the Personnel Administrative Measures, SMTs should provide teachers with the latest ideas, techniques, evaluations, and resources in their fields. They should assist with planning and managing teaching and learning and cooperate with colleagues to maintain good teaching standards and learner progress. SMTs are responsible for quality teaching and learning and should know the prescribed National Curriculum, including its values and goals. This knowledge supports effective teaching and learning, helping schools develop a learning culture and raise achievement levels. Mogashoa (2013) states that SMT's are the backbones of a school, and they carry all the responsibilities to support and develop teachers to ensure that SRL is implemented effectively in the school. SMT's are responsible for quality teaching and learning and should be able to manage their roles effectively to ensure that teachers are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge of SRL. Overall, the roles and responsibilities of the SMT imply a commitment to supporting teachers in developing learners' SRL skills through collaboration, professional development, and effective management of teaching and learning activities.

### 3. Research design and methodology

A qualitative research design located within an interpretivist research paradigm was followed in this study. Mohajan (2018) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer to the world. It involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. We decided to use a qualitative, pseudo-phenomenological study to explore the teaching strategies used by teachers to develop self-regulated learning. Pseudo-phenomenological implies that this study has some elements of a phenomenological study that enabled us to explore a real-life situation, namely the daily experiences of teachers in their classrooms, and to develop a composite description of the essence of the individuals' experiences (Emiliussen, Engelsen, Christiansen, & Klausen, 2021).

The population of this study was all the primary school teachers in the Lejweleputswa district which consists of 213 schools and 4 528 teachers. We used purposive sampling to select fifteen participants from three primary schools. The first author of the study collected data collection via single, semi-structured interviews with participants.

We used content analysis and a thematic approach to analyse the data by means of inductive coding. We applied for ethical clearance from the North West University and gained permission for the research from legal authorities such as the Department of Basic Education and school principals. The ethical guidelines provided by the University were always observed.

### 4. Discussion of findings

We used verbatim quotes, which are printed in italics to present the understandable descriptions of the teachers' (participants') perceptions about their challenges with developing SRL and the support, if any that they receive from SMT's. Reference codes are placed after each verbatim quotation to identify the participants and the schools, where 'P' represents the participant and 'S' represents the school.

#### 4.1. Theme 1: Challenges do intermediate phase teachers experience with the fostering of self-regulated learning skills

Next follow some of the participants' responses when asked about the challenges they experience with developing SRL skills in intermediate phase learners. Six participants (*P1S1, P4S1, P3S1, P4S1, P5S2, P4S3*) responded that they had not heard of or had no knowledge of SRL. One participant stated: *I do not know anything about self-regulated learning, or even heard about it (P4S1)*. Seven participants (*P1S1, P2S1, P4S1, P5S1, P2S2, P5S3*) indicated that time constraints are a challenge. *P2S2* responded: *Time is a challenge because we are forced to cover the curriculum, when it is like that you are forced to rush to complete the syllabus and now it is worse because of COVID 19. There is no longer time to enhance learners to work on their own.*

The other two factors that were mentioned as a challenge by most of the participants are insufficient teaching and learning resources and lack of parental involvement. The following are examples of their responses: *Lack of resources, in terms of textbooks, posters, atlases, because I am also teaching Social Sciences, we don't have a globe to show learners the world (P5S3)*. Another participant clarified: *I don't really involve parents because it's actually a waste of time for me because you call parents, sometimes they don't come, when they come, they will just say they will be involved but they don't. I normally do things on my own (P4S1)*.

Three participants (*P1S1, P4S1, P2S2*) indicated that one challenge they encounter is that learners do not do their homework, as well as overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, one participant indicated that one challenge most teachers experience is that the system of education is more focussed on results than giving quality education to learners: *It plays a huge role because no child should fail... I feel*

*that their marks are not a reflection of their understanding, the marks are just what we are expected to give because we want good numbers that is why in the next grade, they do not know what they have learned (P1S2).*

Participants noted that most primary schools lack internet access, available only in administration offices off-limits to teachers and learners. Kartika and Mania (2017) confirm these challenges, highlighting that primary schools in lower quintiles are overcrowded and lack sufficient time for effective teaching, making it hard for teachers to address each learners' needs and focus on the fostering of self-regulated learning skills.

In the second theme below, the participants' perceptions of the support they receive from school management teams are discussed.

#### **4.2. Theme 2: School management team support to develop self-regulated learning**

Participants responses revealed they receive varied support from the SMT's. Some other participants (P3S1, P1S2, P3S2, P5S2, P1S3, P2S3, P4S3, P5S3) disclosed that their head of departments give them emotional support by giving them hope and comfort when they cannot cope with the workload and discipline of learners. This type of support can indirectly be linked to the development of SRL, because emotional support keeps teachers motivated to teach as indicated by the following response: *I was once in a position where I see my learners failing. I was emotionally drowning, my Head of Department (HOD) gave me emotional support, she gave me teaching strategies and slowly and surely, I saw improvement (P5S3).*

Another type of support mentioned by the participants was support with teaching and learning resources and documents in the form of textbooks that should be used by learners, timetables, annual teaching plans, circulars, and policy documents from the Department of Basic Education. The participants revealed that they attend meetings with the SMT and the subject advisors where the main discussion is learning content, assessment, and planning instead of teaching strategies that develop SRL.

However, nine participants (P2S1, P3S1, P4S1, P5S1, P1S2, P3S2, P5S2, P3S3, P4S3) revealed that they do not receive support from the SMT's. Some participants expressed their frustration with the limited support in saying the only thing that matters is pass rates, and the SMT and the Basic Department of Education put pressure on them for high pass rates. This is how one participant explained: *Not at all, as long as learners pass that's what matters, they put pressure on us, and all that they want is results (P3S3).*

Some participants, (P3S1, P4S1, P5S1, P1S2, P3S2) also mentioned that the SMT is interested in learners getting good grades but places no emphasis on how to assist teachers with teaching and learning strategies that can assist learners to pass. One participant noted that after every formal assessment, they must conduct an item and error analysis and create a subject improvement plan to address underperformance and devise intervention strategies. Although these analyses are submitted to the SMT and subject advisors, no feedback or discussions on the intervention strategies occur. Consequently, the participant perceive that these plans are merely submitted for compliance rather than being used to develop pedagogical knowledge beneficial for SRL skills in various subjects.

### **5. Conclusion**

The findings revealed that most of the participants indicated lack of pedagogical content knowledge to develop SRL skills, insufficient time, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and the result- rather than quality-orientation of education are challenges to developing SRL skills in their learners. All the challenges mentioned by the participants have a substantial impact on creating a classroom atmosphere that is conducive for the development of SRL. Based on the roles and responsibilities outlined for the School Management Team (SMT), the following recommendations are offered. SMTs should disseminate the latest teaching approaches, including strategies for SRL to help teachers integrate these into their instruction. SMTs should support teachers in planning lessons that promote SRL through activities encouraging goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflection, and support classroom management for SRL. SMT should provide professional development courses for intermediate phase teachers to foster a culture of collaboration where teachers share strategies and resources for the promotion of SRL. This might involve facilitating professional learning communities or providing time and space for teachers to collaborate and reflect on their practice. The issue of overcrowded classrooms and heavy teacher workloads, which hinder the development of SRL skills in intermediate phase learners, should be addressed.

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