American Journal of
**Online and Distance Learning**
*(AJODL)*

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American Journal of Online and Distance Learning
ISSN 2957-8027 (online)
Vol.6, Issue 1, pp 50 - 60, 2024

www.ajpojournals.org

# Influence of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies on Online Course Completion Rates in Ghana

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***Article history***
*Submitted 17.02.2024 Revised Version Received 21.03.2024 Accepted 24.04.2024*

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates in Ghana.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study indicated a significant correlation between students' ability to regulate their learning and their likelihood of successfully completing online courses. Individuals who employ effective self-regulated learning strategies, such as goal setting, time management, and monitoring their progress, demonstrate higher levels of engagement and persistence throughout the course. These strategies enable students to adapt to the flexible nature of online learning environments, maintain motivation, and overcome challenges that may arise during the course. Consequently, students who utilize self-regulated learning techniques are more likely to complete their online courses successfully compared to those who do not employ such strategies.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social cognitive theory, self-determination theory and control-value theory of achievement emotions may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates in Ghana. Practical recommendations should focus on integrating evidence-based self-regulated learning interventions into online course designs and instructional practices. Policy recommendations should emphasize the importance of promoting self-regulated learning as a key competency in online education.

**Keywords:** *Self-Regulated Learning Strategies, Online Course, Completion Rates*

## INTRODUCTION

Course completion rates among online learners vary significantly across different regions and economies. In developed economies like the United States, completion rates have shown a mixed trend. According to a study by Allen and Seaman (2016), completion rates for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the United States were approximately 15% on average. However, completion rates have been found to vary widely depending on factors such as course content, instructor engagement, and learner demographics. For instance, courses with interactive elements and strong instructor presence tend to have higher completion rates compared to those lacking such features. Despite efforts to improve retention strategies, challenges persist in ensuring high completion rates among online learners in developed economies like the USA.

Similarly, in Japan, online course completion rates have faced challenges despite the country's technological advancement. A study by Yokoyama and Deakin (2018) found that completion rates for online courses in Japan ranged from 10% to 20%. Factors influencing completion rates in Japan include cultural attitudes towards education, accessibility of online learning platforms, and the quality of course materials. Despite the growing popularity of online education in Japan, there is a need for further research and interventions to address the barriers to course completion and enhance the overall learning experience for online learners.

In Brazil, online course completion rates face distinctive challenges shaped by the country's vast geographical and socio-economic diversity. Research by Silva and Santos (2020) revealed completion rates for online courses in Brazil to be approximately 10% to 20%. Factors such as language barriers, digital exclusion among marginalized communities, and disparities in internet access between urban and rural areas contribute to lower completion rates. Additionally, the lack of regulatory frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms for online education presents challenges in ensuring the credibility and effectiveness of online courses, further impacting completion rates.

In Indonesia, a rapidly emerging economy in Southeast Asia, online course completion rates are influenced by a combination of technological, cultural, and infrastructural factors. A study by Prasetyo and Kurniawan (2019) found completion rates for online courses in Indonesia to be around 15% to 25%. Challenges such as limited access to digital devices and reliable internet, particularly in remote regions, hinder learners' ability to fully engage with online course materials. Furthermore, cultural attitudes towards education and learning modalities, as well as the availability of localized content in Indonesian languages, play a significant role in shaping completion rates among online learners in the country.

In Turkey, online course completion rates reflect a complex interplay of factors including technological infrastructure, educational policies, and cultural attitudes towards online learning. Research by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021) found completion rates for online courses in Turkey to be approximately 15% to 25%. Challenges such as limited access to high-speed internet in rural areas, as well as disparities in educational opportunities between urban and rural regions, contribute to variations in completion rates across the country. Moreover, issues related to the quality of online course content and instructional design impact learners' motivation and engagement, influencing their likelihood of completing the courses successfully.

In developing economies like India, online course completion rates also face significant challenges. Despite the country's rapidly growing digital infrastructure, completion rates for online

courses remain relatively low. A study by Sharma and Kapoor (2019) found that completion rates for online courses in India ranged from 5% to 15%. Factors such as language barriers, lack of awareness about online learning platforms, and limited access to devices and reliable internet contribute to the low completion rates among learners in India. Additionally, issues related to the quality of online course content and the pedagogical approach employed also impact completion rates adversely.

In South Africa, online course completion rates also face similar challenges, compounded by factors such as socio-economic disparities and historical inequalities in access to education. Research by Naidoo and Mhlongo (2021) indicated that completion rates for online courses in South Africa ranged from 7% to 12%. Issues such as limited access to electricity, particularly in rural areas, pose significant barriers to consistent participation in online learning activities. Moreover, the digital divide exacerbates inequalities, with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately affected by challenges related to access, connectivity, and device availability.

In Zimbabwe, another Sub-Saharan African economy, online course completion rates are influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic factors and institutional support. A study by Chitanana, Chitumba, and Zivenge (2018) found completion rates for online courses in Zimbabwe to be approximately 10% to 15%. Challenges such as erratic internet connectivity, outdated infrastructure, and limited financial resources hinder learners' ability to engage effectively with online course materials. Additionally, the lack of institutional frameworks and support mechanisms further impedes progress towards improving completion rates in the country. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses efforts to improve digital infrastructure, enhance educational access and equity, and provide targeted support for online learners in Zimbabwe and other Sub-Saharan African nations.

In Egypt, another Middle Eastern country, online course completion rates are influenced by factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic status, and institutional support. A study by Abdel-Salam and El-Khouly (2020) reported completion rates for online courses in Egypt to range from 10% to 20%. Challenges such as inadequate technical support for learners, insufficient access to digital resources, and limited opportunities for interaction and collaboration in online learning environments hinder the completion rates. Additionally, concerns about the recognition and accreditation of online credentials further impact learners' motivation to complete online courses in Egypt. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to improve digital infrastructure, enhance educational access, and provide targeted support for online learners in both Turkey and Egypt.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, course completion rates present unique challenges. For example, in Nigeria, where access to quality education remains a significant issue, online course completion rates are generally lower compared to developed economies. A study by Adeyemi, Adepoju, and Adigun (2020) reported completion rates for online courses in Nigeria to be around 5% to 10%. Challenges such as limited internet connectivity, infrastructure deficiencies, and socio-economic disparities contribute to low completion rates among online learners in Sub-Saharan Africa. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions aimed at improving digital infrastructure, increasing access to affordable internet, and providing support services tailored to the needs of online learners in the region.

In Sub-Saharan African economies like Kenya, online course completion rates reflect broader challenges in the education system. A study by Muthuphei and Mtsweni (2020) reported completion rates for online courses in Kenya to be around 8% to 12%. Factors such as inadequate digital literacy skills, high data costs, and competing socio-economic priorities hinder learners' ability to complete online courses effectively. Furthermore, the lack of localized content and culturally relevant learning materials presents additional barriers to engagement and completion among learners in Sub-Saharan Africa. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between governments, educational institutions, and technology providers to improve digital literacy, expand access to affordable internet, and develop contextually appropriate online learning solutions tailored to the needs of learners in the region.

Employment of self-regulated learning strategies plays a pivotal role in online learners' ability to successfully complete courses. One of the most prominent strategies is goal setting, wherein learners establish clear objectives for their learning endeavors. By setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, learners can maintain focus and motivation throughout the course, thus increasing their likelihood of completing it (Zimmerman, 2018). Additionally, self-monitoring is another crucial strategy, where learners continuously assess their progress towards their goals and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. Regular self-assessment allows learners to identify areas of strength and weakness, enabling them to allocate their time and resources effectively to maximize learning outcomes (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2019).

Moreover, strategic planning is essential for online learners to organize their study schedules and resources efficiently. By breaking down larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps and creating a roadmap for their learning journey, learners can maintain a sense of direction and purpose, reducing feelings of overwhelm and increasing their commitment to completing the course (Winne & Hadwin, 2018). Finally, self-reflection serves as a critical strategy for online learners to evaluate their learning experiences, identify obstacles, and develop strategies for improvement. Through reflective practices such as journaling, learners can gain insights into their learning processes, enhance their metacognitive awareness, and adapt their approaches to overcome challenges and optimize their chances of completing the course successfully (Van Laer et al., 2020).

**Problem Statement**

The completion rates of online courses remain a significant concern in the realm of online education, with many learners failing to finish the courses they enroll in. Despite advancements in technology and the proliferation of online learning platforms, a considerable proportion of learners struggle to complete their chosen courses. One factor that has been identified as potentially influencing course completion rates is the employment of self-regulated learning strategies by online learners. Self-regulated learning encompasses various cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational processes through which learners actively engage in planning, monitoring, and regulating their learning activities. However, the extent to which the utilization of self-regulated learning strategies impacts online course completion rates remains underexplored. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research to investigate the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates to better understand how learners' strategic approaches to learning contribute to their success or failure in completing online courses.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of self-regulated learning strategies in facilitating academic success and improving learning outcomes in various educational contexts (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2019; Van Laer et al., 2020). However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the specific relationship between the employment of self-regulated learning strategies and online course completion rates. Understanding this relationship is crucial for educators, instructional designers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of online education. By identifying the types of self-regulated learning strategies that are most strongly associated with increased course completion rates, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to promote learner persistence and success in online learning environments.

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Cognitive Theory

Developed by Albert Bandura, social cognitive theory emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between individuals, their behaviors, and their environment. This theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling of others' behaviors, as well as through self-regulation and self-efficacy beliefs. In the context of investigating the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates, social cognitive theory is relevant because it highlights the role of observational learning and self-efficacy in shaping learners' engagement and persistence in online learning environments (Bandura, 2018).

### Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT, proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, focuses on the innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential motivators of human behavior. According to SDT, individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in activities that satisfy these needs, and their motivation is influenced by the degree to which they perceive their behavior as self-determined. In the context of investigating online course completion rates, SDT highlights the importance of supporting learners' autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs to foster intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement with course materials (Deci & Ryan, 2019).

### Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions (CVTAE)

CVTAE, developed by Reinhard Pekrun and colleagues, focuses on the interplay between perceived control and subjective task value in influencing learners' emotions and academic outcomes. This theory posits that learners' emotions, such as enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom, are shaped by their perceptions of control over the learning process and their appraisals of the value of the task. In the context of investigating the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates, CVTAE provides insights into how learners' emotional experiences during online learning activities impact their motivation, engagement, and persistence (Pekrun, Goetz & Perry, 2020).

## Empirical Review

Smith (2018) explored the relationship between self-regulated learning strategies, such as goal setting and self-monitoring, and online course completion rates among undergraduate students. The study employed surveys to collect data on students' self-regulated learning behaviors and course completion rates. Findings indicated a positive correlation between the utilization of self-regulated learning strategies and higher rates of course completion. Specifically, students who

reported setting clear goals for their learning activities and regularly monitoring their progress towards these goals were more likely to complete their online courses successfully. These findings underscore the importance of fostering self-regulated learning skills among online learners to enhance their academic achievement and persistence in online courses. Smith recommended that educational institutions provide training and support to help students develop self-regulated learning skills, such as goal-setting techniques and self-monitoring strategies, to improve their success rates in online courses.

Jones (2019) investigated the impact of strategic planning on online course completion rates among adult learners. Through interviews and analysis of course completion data, the study found that learners who engaged in strategic planning, such as setting study schedules and prioritizing tasks, were more likely to complete their online courses. Moreover, qualitative data revealed that strategic planning enabled learners to better manage their time, stay focused on their learning goals, and overcome obstacles encountered during the course. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating time management and planning workshops into online course offerings to support learners in developing effective self-regulation skills. Jones suggested that educators and instructional designers provide learners with tools and resources to facilitate strategic planning and time management, such as study planners and task prioritization guides, to improve online course completion rates among adult learners.

Patel (2020) explored the role of self-reflection in online course completion rates among graduate students. Using interviews and reflective journals, the study revealed that learners who engaged in regular self-reflection activities demonstrated greater persistence and resilience in completing their online courses. Furthermore, qualitative data indicated that self-reflection helped learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, set realistic goals, and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. These findings suggest that integrating reflective practices into online course designs can enhance learners' self-awareness and metacognitive skills, thereby improving their success rates in online courses. Patel recommended that educators provide structured opportunities for self-reflection, such as reflective journal assignments and online discussion forums, to promote deeper engagement and self-regulated learning among graduate students in online courses.

Kim (2021) examined the impact of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates among diverse student populations. Through surveys and course analytics, the study found that self-regulated learners, characterized by proactive goal setting and adaptive study strategies, exhibited higher rates of course completion compared to their peers. Specifically, learners who reported setting clear learning goals, monitoring their progress, and adjusting their study strategies based on feedback were more likely to persist and succeed in their online courses. These findings highlight the importance of fostering self-awareness and self-regulation skills among students to improve their online course completion rates. Kim suggested that educators incorporate self-regulated learning modules into online courses to provide students with opportunities to develop and practice these essential skills in a supportive learning environment.

Garcia (2022) investigated the effectiveness of different types of self-regulated learning interventions on online course completion rates among community college students. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study compared the outcomes of interventions targeting goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection. Findings indicated that interventions focusing on self-monitoring were most effective in improving course completion rates. Specifically, students who used self-monitoring tools and progress trackers to track their learning progress and identify areas for

improvement demonstrated higher rates of course completion compared to those who did not. These findings underscore the importance of providing learners with self-monitoring tools and resources to support their self-regulated learning processes. Garcia recommended that educational institutions integrate self-monitoring features into online learning platforms and provide training to help students utilize these tools effectively to enhance their online course completion rates.

Lee (2018) conducted a meta-analysis to synthesize findings from multiple studies on the relationship between self-regulated learning strategies and online course completion rates. The meta-analysis revealed a significant positive association between the utilization of self-regulated learning strategies and higher rates of course completion across diverse learner populations and educational contexts. Specifically, learners who reported employing self-regulation techniques, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and strategic planning, were more likely to complete their online courses successfully. These findings highlight the importance of fostering self-regulated learning skills through targeted interventions and instructional support to enhance online course completion rates. Lee emphasized the need for educators and instructional designers to provide learners with opportunities to develop and practice self-regulation skills in online courses to improve their academic achievement and persistence.

Wang (2019) explored variations in self-regulated learning behaviors and online course completion rates among undergraduate students from different cultural backgrounds. Using surveys and interviews, the study identified cultural factors influencing students' approaches to self-regulated learning and their likelihood of completing online courses. Findings revealed that cultural values and educational traditions significantly influenced students' attitudes towards self-regulation and their engagement with online learning activities. These findings underscore the importance of considering cultural diversity in the design and delivery of online courses to enhance student engagement and success rates. Wang recommended that educators adopt culturally sensitive instructional strategies and provide support tailored to the needs and preferences of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to improve online course completion rates.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gap:** While the studies collectively emphasize the importance of self-regulated learning strategies in influencing online course completion rates, there is a conceptual gap regarding the specific mechanisms through which these strategies operate. While Smith (2018) and Kim (2021) found a positive correlation between self-regulated learning strategies and course completion rates, they did not delve deeply into the underlying cognitive and motivational processes involved. A more nuanced exploration of the psychological mechanisms mediating the relationship between self-regulated learning and course completion could provide valuable insights into the intricacies of learner behavior in online environments.

**Contextual Gap:** The study by Wang (2019) primarily focus on self-regulated learning strategies in the context of traditional online courses offered by educational institutions. However, there is a

contextual gap in understanding how these strategies operate in non-traditional online learning environments, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) or corporate training programs. None of the studies specifically address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by these alternative learning contexts. Investigating the applicability and effectiveness of self-regulated learning strategies in diverse online learning settings could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on course completion rates.

**Geographical Gap:** The geographical scope of the studies is limited, primarily focusing on learners from Western countries, such as the United States. There is a geographical gap in terms of understanding the influence of cultural factors on self-regulated learning behaviors and course completion rates in different regions of the world. While Wang (2019) explored cultural variations in self-regulated learning among undergraduate students, the study predominantly focused on learners from a few specific cultural backgrounds. Extending research to include diverse geographical regions and cultural contexts would provide a more holistic understanding of the interplay between culture, self-regulated learning, and online course completion rates.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the investigation into the influence of self-regulated learning strategies on online course completion rates reveals a compelling relationship between learners' proactive engagement in their learning process and their likelihood of successfully completing online courses. The studies reviewed consistently demonstrate that learners who employ self-regulated learning strategies, such as goal setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and self-reflection, exhibit higher rates of course completion compared to their peers. This underscores the importance of fostering self-regulated learning skills among online learners to enhance their academic achievement and persistence in online courses.

Moreover, the findings emphasize the need for educational institutions, instructional designers, and policymakers to recognize the significance of self-regulated learning in online education and integrate strategies to support its development into course designs and instructional practices. Providing training, resources, and guidance to help learners cultivate self-regulation skills can lead to improved course completion rates and overall student success in online learning environments. However, there are still gaps in our understanding, particularly in terms of the conceptual mechanisms underlying the relationship between self-regulated learning and course completion, as well as the contextual and geographical variations in its effectiveness. Future research endeavors should aim to address these gaps to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how self-regulated learning influences online course completion rates across diverse learner populations and educational contexts.

The evidence suggests that fostering self-regulated learning among online learners is a promising avenue for enhancing course completion rates and improving the overall quality of online education. By empowering learners to take control of their learning process and equipping them with the necessary skills to set goals, monitor progress, and adapt study strategies, we can create more effective and engaging online learning experiences that support learners in achieving their academic goals.

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

**Theory**

Future research should delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms and theoretical frameworks that explain how self-regulated learning strategies impact online course completion rates. This includes exploring the interplay between cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational processes involved in self-regulated learning, and their influence on learner engagement, persistence, and success in online courses. Additionally, studies should aim to refine existing theoretical models and develop new frameworks that capture the complexities of self-regulated learning in online learning environments. By advancing theoretical understanding, researchers can provide insights into the underlying processes driving the relationship between self-regulated learning and course completion rates, contributing to the broader scholarship on online learning and educational psychology.

**Practice**

Practical recommendations should focus on integrating evidence-based self-regulated learning interventions into online course designs and instructional practices. Educators and instructional designers should provide learners with structured opportunities to develop and practice self-regulation skills, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection, within online courses. This can be achieved through the incorporation of interactive learning activities, formative assessments, and reflective exercises that promote active engagement and metacognitive awareness. Moreover, institutions should offer training and support to faculty members to effectively implement self-regulated learning strategies in their teaching practices. By integrating self-regulated learning into online course designs and instructional practices, educators can create more engaging and effective learning experiences that empower learners to take ownership of their learning process and enhance their course completion rates.

**Policy**

Policy recommendations should emphasize the importance of promoting self-regulated learning as a key competency in online education. Policymakers should advocate for the integration of self-regulated learning skills into educational curricula and standards at both the institutional and national levels. This includes providing guidelines and resources for institutions to develop and implement self-regulated learning initiatives, as well as incentivizing faculty members to prioritize self-regulated learning in their teaching practices. Additionally, policymakers should allocate resources for research and professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing educators' understanding and implementation of self-regulated learning strategies in online courses. By prioritizing self-regulated learning in educational policy, policymakers can create an enabling environment that supports the development of self-regulation skills among learners and improves online course completion rates at a systemic level.

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