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SELF-EFFICACY AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS' ADAPTATION TO IB EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY MODEL OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING

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Abstract: This article examines the role of academic self-efficacy in students' adaptation to changes in educational models during the transition from predominantly teacher-directed schooling to the International Baccalaureate (IB), which requires greater learner autonomy, inquiry, and self-regulation. Particular attention is devoted to B. Zimmerman's concept of self-regulated learning and the relationships between self-efficacy, goal setting, learning strategies, academic motivation, persistence, and students' ability to organize their own learning. The article discusses the contribution of the IB Approaches to Learning to the gradual development of competencies required in higher education and argues for systematic psychological and pedagogical support during educational transitions.

Keywords: self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, International Baccalaureate, IB, educational adaptation, learner autonomy, self-regulation, independent learning, university readiness.

Introduction

Contemporary education is increasingly shifting from predominantly reproductive approaches to knowledge acquisition toward approaches that require learners to participate actively in organizing their own educational activities. The ability to identify learning objectives, search for and critically evaluate information, select effective learning strategies, manage time, monitor progress, and reflect on outcomes is becoming increasingly important.

These changes are particularly relevant to students moving from environments characterized by extensive external teacher guidance into the International Baccalaureate (IB). Such a transition entails not only mastering new subject content but also changing the learner's position within the educational process.

In a predominantly teacher-directed model, the teacher may serve as the main organizer of learning by determining the sequence of topics, explaining content in detail, providing step-by-step procedures, and regularly monitoring performance.

In an educational environment emphasizing independence and inquiry, the teacher's role changes in part. Alongside teaching subject knowledge, the teacher creates conditions for inquiry, provides direction and feedback, and progressively helps students learn to manage their own learning.

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The educational transition can therefore be viewed as a distinct situation of psychological and academic adaptation in which students must restructure previously established learning practices.

Academic self-efficacy is one psychological resource that may facilitate this process.

Theoretical Foundations of Self-Efficacy Research

The concept of self-efficacy was systematically developed within Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. It refers to a person's belief in their ability to organize and carry out the actions required to achieve a particular outcome.

It is essential to distinguish self-efficacy from general self-esteem. Self-efficacy does not represent an overall evaluation of oneself but rather a subjective judgment of one's ability to perform a particular activity or category of tasks successfully.

In educational contexts, academic self-efficacy refers to a learner's belief in their ability to organize and carry out actions necessary to accomplish academic tasks.

A student may therefore possess sufficient intellectual abilities and subject knowledge while lacking confidence in independently conducting research, managing workload, locating appropriate sources, preparing a project, or completing a demanding assignment without constant external direction.

In this context, self-efficacy becomes an important variable in educational adaptation.

Self-Efficacy in B. Zimmerman's Framework

Barry Zimmerman made a substantial contribution to the study of self-efficacy in educational settings.

In "Self-Efficacy: An Essential Motive to Learn," Zimmerman considers self-efficacy an important factor in motivation and learning. He emphasizes its associations with activity choice, effort expenditure, persistence in the face of difficulties, and emotional reactions during academic tasks.

Of particular significance is the relationship Zimmerman identifies between self-efficacy and self-regulated learning.

Self-regulated learning involves an active learner who is not merely the recipient of pedagogical influence but also an agent in their own educational activity.

Within this approach, students, independently or with gradually decreasing external support, set goals, choose task strategies, organize their learning environment, manage time, use educational resources, monitor performance, assess progress, and revise their initial strategies when necessary.

Successful learning therefore depends not only on the quantity of knowledge acquired but also on the learner's ability to regulate cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes.

Zimmerman stresses that self-regulation is not a characteristic that students either possess completely or lack entirely. It can develop progressively and vary in degree.

This observation is particularly relevant to understanding students' adaptation to IB education.

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Transition to IB as a Change in the Learner's Educational Role

When entering an IB educational environment, students may encounter changes in their customary organization of learning.

This should not be understood as a simplistic opposition between "traditional" and "modern" education, or as a claim that teachers explain everything in one system while students receive no support in the other.

A more accurate approach is to examine changes in the degree of learner autonomy and the nature of pedagogical guidance.

In a student's previous educational experience, external regulation may have predominated: teachers determined the content, sequence, materials, and assessment criteria.

In the IB environment, learners are increasingly expected to apply research, communication, thinking, and organizational skills independently.

The resulting transition can be described as follows:

external regulation of learning → shared regulation → independent regulation of learning.

This shift may represent one of the most significant adaptation challenges.

Students who previously achieved strong academic results mainly under detailed instructions and continuous external monitoring may temporarily experience a reduced sense of competence when requirements change.

They may have adequate knowledge yet struggle to independently determine a sequence of actions, find additional sources, allocate time, or select a problem-solving strategy.

Adaptation difficulties do not therefore necessarily indicate insufficient academic ability. In some cases, they may reflect underdeveloped self-regulated learning skills and limited academic self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulated Learning

Zimmerman's approach helps explain the psychological mechanisms underlying this transition.

Self-regulated learners do more than follow teachers' instructions. They participate actively in organizing their own educational activities.

This process includes several interrelated components.

The first is goal setting. Students need to understand not only what assignment must be completed but also what learning outcome is intended.

The second is strategic planning. Learners identify the sequence of actions, resources, and methods required to reach a goal.

The third is self-monitoring. While completing an assignment, students monitor comprehension, attention, time use, and the alignment of their actions with the goal.

The fourth involves reflection and self-evaluation. After completing a task, students consider which strategies were effective, what difficulties arose, and what should be changed in future similar tasks.

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Self-efficacy interacts with each of these components.

Students who believe they can handle an assignment are more likely to accept demanding tasks, invest effort, and persist after encountering initial difficulties.

With lower self-efficacy, difficulty may be interpreted not as a signal to change strategy but as evidence of personal inability.

Consequently, students may avoid challenging assignments, postpone them, depend excessively on teacher assistance, or abandon attempts quickly after failure.

Developing self-efficacy can thus be viewed as one mechanism supporting the transition from externally regulated to self-regulated learning.

Connections Between Zimmerman's Framework and the IB Educational Approach

Zimmerman's theoretical propositions correspond substantively with several principles of the IB educational model.

The International Baccalaureate emphasizes Approaches to Learning (ATL), comprising five interconnected skill categories:

— thinking skills;

— research skills;

— communication skills;

— social skills;

— self-management skills.

Developing these competencies aims to enable students to manage their own learning.

Self-management and research skills are especially important for the present discussion.

Self-management involves organizing time and tasks and managing motivation and personal states. Research skills involve independently locating, evaluating, comparing, and using information.

Zimmerman's account of self-regulated learning and the IB approach thus converge on a central principle: an effective learner is an active agent in their own education.

The Role of Self-Efficacy in Adaptation to New Academic Requirements

Self-efficacy may serve several functions during educational adaptation.

Motivational Function

Belief in one's ability to complete an academic task influences willingness to begin and persist when difficulties arise.

This is especially important when transitioning to a more independent learning model, where students more frequently encounter tasks without a fully prescribed solution procedure.

Regulatory Function

Self-efficacy supports students' readiness to plan actions independently, monitor their implementation, and adjust strategies.

Instead of waiting for a ready-made answer, students gradually learn to ask: "What actions can I take to solve this problem?"

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Adaptive Function

Changes in educational environments inevitably expose learners to uncertainty.

High academic self-efficacy does not imply an absence of difficulty. Rather, it involves confidence in the possibility of coping through one's actions, available resources, and appropriate help-seeking.

Emotional-Regulatory Function

Zimmerman highlights the relationship between self-efficacy and students' emotional responses.

When confidence is low, demanding assignments may be accompanied by marked anxiety and expectations of failure.

With stronger self-efficacy, difficulty is more likely to be understood as a task requiring effort, additional time, or a revised strategy.

Transition to the University Model of Learning

The issue extends beyond secondary education.

University entry generally entails a further increase in academic independence.

In higher education, instructors provide theoretical and methodological foundations, identify areas for study, and organize lectures, seminars, and practical classes. However, a substantial portion of deeper learning takes place through students' independent work.

Students are expected to engage with scholarly literature, study specific questions independently, prepare projects, meet deadlines, manage academic workloads, and take responsibility for their educational outcomes.

Developing self-regulated learning during the upper secondary years can therefore serve as gradual preparation for the university environment.

In this respect, IB education can provide a setting in which students begin developing skills needed for subsequent academic independence.

Psychological Risks of Educational Transition

Nevertheless, increasing expectations for independence does not automatically produce self-regulation.

If external support is reduced abruptly before students have developed the necessary strategies, the opposite effect may occur.

Repeated unsuccessful experiences with demanding independent assignments may contribute to reduced academic self-efficacy.

Students may interpret difficulties as evidence of limited ability rather than as a normal stage in learning a new educational model.

It is therefore crucial to distinguish independence from lack of support.

Developing independence requires gradual changes in pedagogical assistance. Initially, students receive structure, demonstrations, and feedback. As their skills develop, direct guidance decreases while their responsibility for organizing learning increases.

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This approach creates opportunities for successful independent performance and, consequently, for strengthening academic self-efficacy.

Psychological Support During the Adaptation Period

The transition to IB education should be accompanied by systematic psychological and pedagogical support.

The first area may involve assessment of academic self-efficacy, learning motivation, adaptation, self-regulation, and perceived academic workload.

The second is psychoeducation. Students should be informed about the characteristics of the new learning model and why independent work plays a greater role.

It is particularly important to prevent the mistaken interpretation that fewer step-by-step instructions mean the absence of teacher support.

The third area involves developing specific self-regulated learning skills: goal setting, planning, time management, strategy selection, progress monitoring, and reflection.

The fourth area focuses on academic self-efficacy.

From a social cognitive perspective, opportunities for attainable success are particularly important. Learning tasks should be sufficiently challenging to promote growth while remaining appropriate to students' current preparation.

The fifth area involves monitoring adaptation over time.

Follow-up assessment after a defined period may examine changes in self-efficacy, independence, learning motivation, and perceived difficulty of educational requirements.

A Practical Model of Adaptation

Based on the theoretical perspectives discussed, students' progression toward independent learning can be presented as a sequence of stages.

Stage 1. External Regulation.

The teacher provides a detailed structure, demonstrates methods of solving problems, and guides task completion.

Stage 2. Shared Regulation.

The teacher establishes the general structure and direction of work while the student makes some decisions independently.

Stage 3. Guided Independence.

The student independently selects strategies and organizes work, consulting the teacher primarily for feedback.

Stage 4. Self-Regulated Learning.

The student can set goals, plan activities, select resources, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes.

Stage 5. Readiness for Academic Independence at University.

The skills developed are transferred to more demanding research and educational tasks.

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Self-efficacy functions as a psychological resource supporting movement from one stage to the next.

Discussion

Comparing the social cognitive conception of self-efficacy, Zimmerman's model of self-regulated learning, and IB principles suggests a close relationship between academic self-efficacy and successful adaptation to educational environments requiring greater independence.

Self-efficacy is associated not only with subjective confidence but also with academic behavior, including task choice, effort, persistence, and emotional responses.

Self-regulated learning, in turn, helps translate this confidence into concrete actions: setting goals, planning, using strategies, managing time, seeking assistance, and evaluating progress.

Accordingly, the following theoretical sequence may be proposed:

academic self-efficacy → activation of self-regulation → greater learner autonomy → more successful adaptation to IB → readiness for university-level independent learning.

This sequence requires further empirical testing but may serve as a theoretical model for research involving students in Grades 9–10.

Conclusion

The transition from an educational environment characterized predominantly by external regulation to the International Baccalaureate represents a significant change in students' roles as learners.

Adaptation involves mastering not only new subject content but also new approaches to learning: independent information retrieval, goal setting, strategy selection, time organization, progress monitoring, and reflection.

Academic self-efficacy can be considered an important psychological resource in this process.

Bandura's work provides a theoretical foundation for understanding self-efficacy, while Zimmerman's research places it within the context of motivation, academic behavior, and self-regulated learning.

Of particular importance is the proposition that self-regulation can be developed intentionally. Students should therefore not be expected to "be independent" without first developing the relevant psychological and learning competencies.

Educational institutions should create conditions for a gradual transition from external teacher guidance toward learner autonomy.

Under such conditions, the IB environment can support not only academic preparation but also psychological preparation for university education, where the ability to organize one's own learning becomes especially important.

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