Teaching Quality and Students' Self-Regulated Learning: The Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Today's education aims at creating lifelong learners. Therefore, education emphasizes creating independent students who can regulate their own learning. Through case study design, this present study was intended to seek in-depth information about teaching quality dimensions that promote self-regulated learning to the primary age students at one English learning community, Rita Home Library. The data was obtained through interviews and observation from both teachers and students. The data was analyzed by coding and theme analysis. The findings showed that setting challenging goal and task; engaging students in learning through metacognitive strategy; implementing clear rules and procedures; managing disciplinary and providing clear deadline; providing meaningful feedback; seeing mistake as a part of learning; being care and open to student's need and emotion were found to be the predictors of teaching quality that were promoted by the teacher to the primary students at Rita Home Library.

Keywords: English Learning, Students' Self-Regulated Learning, Teaching Quality

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how students learn has always been a fascinating and essential part of education. Over the past few decades, research in educational psychology has grown rapidly as educators and scholars continue to explore how to support students in becoming successful, lifelong learners. In today's world, education is no longer just about helping students master subjects like math, science, or language. More than ever, it's about preparing them with essential life skills—such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—that will help them navigate an ever-changing future (Suherdi, 2012).

This shift has brought attention to the importance of self-regulated learning. When students can take control of their own learning—by planning what they need to do, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their results—they are more likely to succeed and stay motivated (Butler, 2010). Students who are able to regulate their learning tend to persist through challenges, learn from their mistakes, and take pride in their growth. As Reiser and colleagues (2013) put it, these learners are not only more successful academically but are also more prepared to learn throughout their lives.

One influential voice in this area is Barry Zimmerman, who introduced a well-known model of self-regulated learning in 1986. His model views learning as a cycle that includes setting goals and planning (forethought phase), carrying out and monitoring the plan (performance phase), and then thinking back on what worked and what didn't (reflection phase). This cycle helps students not only learn content but also become more thoughtful and independent learners (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009; Panadero, 2017).

Although research in self-regulation has often focused on older students or those in formal school settings, many studies have shown that young learners—even those in primary school—can also become self-regulated learners. They are capable of setting goals, staying focused, and reflecting on their learning experiences (Perry, 1998; Joyce & Hipkins, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009). In these early years, the teacher's role becomes even more crucial. Teachers not only guide students through content but also create the environment and structure that help them grow as learners (Rieser et al., 2013).

What teachers do in the classroom—how they present material, interact with students, and manage the flow of the lesson—can deeply influence students' ability to self-regulate. Klime, Pauli, and Reusser (in Rieser et al., 2013) identified three key areas of teaching quality that matter most: cognitive activation, supportive climate, and classroom management. Cognitive activation happens when teachers spark students' thinking by giving them challenging tasks and encouraging them to use strategies and connect new ideas to what they already know (Brophy, 2000; Brown, 1994). A supportive climate is about creating a safe and caring learning environment where students feel valued, supported, and unafraid to make mistakes (Wentzel, 1999; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Classroom management ensures that learning runs smoothly by setting clear expectations and routines (Doyle, 1986; Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

These three elements—thinking deeply, feeling supported, and having structure—have all been found to support self-regulation in meaningful ways. For example, cognitive activation can help students build strategies and stay engaged in learning (Perry, 1998; Joyce & Hipkins, 2004). A supportive climate helps students persevere when tasks get tough (Pintrich, 1999), and effective classroom management helps students stay motivated and focused (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009).

While this topic has been widely explored in formal classroom settings, especially in developed countries, there is still limited research on how teaching quality influences self-regulated learning among younger students in community-based or informal educational settings, especially in Indonesia. There's much to learn about how these concepts play out in more flexible, real-world learning spaces. For that reason, this study seeks to answer the following question: **How does teaching quality affect the self-regulated learning of primary-aged students at one English learning community, Rita Home Library?**

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how teaching quality influences self-regulated learning (SRL) among primary-aged students. As Merriam (2009) explains, a case study enables an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper, more contextual understanding of how self-regulation is fostered through teaching practices. Butler (2002) supports the use of qualitative methods in SRL research, as they allow the researcher to observe and understand how students regulate their learning in authentic learning settings.

The research was conducted at Rita Home Library (RHL), a non-formal English learning community founded in 2010 by Rita Koesma, who also serves as the teacher. Learning sessions are held every Sunday morning from 08.00 to 11.00 and focus on literacy-based activities in English. The community comprises around 30 students of varying competencies, who are grouped accordingly. This study specifically focused on the "green group", consisting of five primary-level students and one teacher (Rita), selected purposively based on their consistent participation and long-term engagement with RHL since kindergarten. This setting was chosen because it aligns with the socio-cognitive theory underpinning Zimmerman's SRL model and provides a natural context in which SRL is likely to develop.

The research utilized the self-regulated learning framework by Zimmerman & Moylan (2009) and the teaching quality dimensions proposed by Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre (2008) and Rieser et al. (2013). Observation and interview were used as the primary instruments. Observations were conducted over three meetings that encompassed a story retelling task. The first meeting introduced the task and allowed students to choose and read their stories. The second and third meetings involved preparation, performance, and vocabulary work (translation or memorization). Throughout the sessions, the teacher and students were observed using a checklist and field notes aligned with the chosen theoretical frameworks. Some performances were also video-recorded. Meanwhile, the Interviews were conducted with both the teacher and students. The teacher responded to approximately 28 guided questions, while students answered around 20 questions, all designed to probe practices and experiences related to SRL and teaching quality. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

The data gathered were analyzed using Creswell's (2002) qualitative procedures: transcribing data, exploring and coding the transcripts, developing themes and subthemes, representing findings, and interpreting them within the theoretical frameworks. The emerging themes included:
- Setting challenging goals and tasks
- Engaging students through metacognitive strategies
- Implementing clear rules and procedures
- Managing discipline and providing clear deadlines
- Providing meaningful feedback
- Viewing mistakes as learning opportunities
- Being caring and responsive to students' needs and emotions

These themes reflect the intersection of teaching quality and self-regulated learning and serve as the basis for the discussion of findings in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study tried to investigate students' self-regulation in learning and whether that self-regulation is promoted by the teacher during teaching. The observation was done in three meetings, while the interview with both the teacher and students was done a week later. The discussions of this study were divided into 9 themes that uncover empirical support for the students' self-regulation that is promoted by their teacher.

Setting challenging goals and tasks

During the observation, it was revealed that the teacher activated students' cognitive aspects by setting challenging tasks through the open task. The teacher gave students a task to retell a story that they could choose for themselves. Open task affects students' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, they will maintain their regulation in learning (Turner, 1995). The teacher provided steps for students to do storytelling. This step also pictured the clear goals that should be reached by the students. As revealed from the teacher's saying that it is important for both the teacher and students to know what the goals of the learning are, to keep the students motivated. Therefore, before the students did the task, the teacher and students discussed the learning goals and expectations that should be reached in each step.

> *Ok, I will take an example, the task of storytelling. In this task, I try to make both of us, me and the students that this task is important in building their courage to speak up. Second I also need to make them understand that in this task the students will comprehend skills, and grammar skills because in communication these skills are important.*

Those clear goals enable students to regulate their learning to plan a strategy to meet the expectations. Besides, this task challenges students to actively find their own learning. By letting the students freely choose the book, the students were not limited to expressing their ideas in learning. The teacher gave the students the freedom to choose any books they liked and that they could understand. Besides, letting students make their own choice will create higher self-control. Therefore, they will likely have higher self-regulation because they know what to think and do (Brown, 2001). Through interviewing the teacher, the reason underlying this attitude was obtained.

> *It is because first I want students to be independent in their learning by deciding what learning source that will help them learn best. And I want them to do what they like. By letting them choose any book I hope they keep motivated to read the book and finish the task until the end.*

In choosing a book to read, the children have already given their consideration. From the interview session, those five children knew what kinds of books suited them to accomplish this task well. For example, Bila and Humaira said that they preferred to choose a book that has pictures inside it. The reason was that those pictures would make it easier for her to catch the

meaning of the story. Other students, Wandi, Ulfa, and Salsa, preferred to choose a short story book that contains a few pages. They wanted to do the task well by making sure that it did not require a longer time to fulfill the task, and doing the memorization so that they could have a faster demonstration to retell the story than other students.

Those considerations create students' agreement and engagement in their learning. This finding is also portrayed in the research conducted by Perry (1998). Employing an open task that is challenging for them creates higher thinking and active participation.

Engaging students in learning through metacognitive strategy

The teacher allowed students to use a metacognitive strategy as the teacher scaffolded students' knowledge and skills by providing steps for the task. Through these steps, students will actively participate in their learning.

There are steps in delivering this task. First of all, each student should choose a storybook, the book that is suitable and can be understood by them. They can choose freely. Then they need to read the book, this is for reading skills. After that, they write the story in their book, this is for writing skills. And then they have to find the difficult word of the word they don't understand yet by themselves in the dictionary. That is a kind of vocabulary skill. Then they have to translate the story, it is because in retelling the story they need to understand the story. This is a comprehension skill. And then the last one they perform to retell the story to encourage their public speaking skill.

Through the scaffolding, students can plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning. These findings are in line with research conducted by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2009) that stated that scaffolding might help students keep on track of what they are doing. It also enables students to maintain their focus to reach the learning goal and outcome because they use a strategy to meet the goals. Providing steps in learning enables students to decide each step on their own. Therefore, students experience a sense of belonging and full engagement.

Activate students' background knowledge

During the observation, this predictor of self-regulation was not found to be promoted by the teacher. The teacher did not provide the link between students' background knowledge and the materials that they learned. As a result, this phenomenon might be a factor in students' difficulties in building vocabulary during the task accomplishment. The teacher revealed this problem during the interview, as described in the following excerpt.

One of the challenges I face is helping students build their vocabulary. Sometimes, when they have to retell a story, they struggle to recall the words they've learned. I think part of the problem is that there isn't always a clear connection between the vocabulary taught in the current lesson and what they've learned before. Some

students also tend to delay doing the task because they already believe that English is difficult for them.

In the interview, the teacher acknowledged that connecting new material with students' prior lessons and background knowledge related to the story could significantly help them complete their tasks more effectively. The teacher realized that when students are able to activate what they already know—whether from previous vocabulary lessons or their own experiences with the topic—they become more confident and engaged. This approach not only supports vocabulary retention but also makes it easier for students to understand the context and express their ideas when retelling a story.

This situation highlights the crucial role of activating students' background knowledge in supporting task completion. Perry (1998) emphasized that connecting what students already know with new learning content can enhance cognitive activation and strengthen long-term memory. Similarly, recent research by Yanbastieva-Petrova (2024) found that activating background knowledge before reading tasks, through discussions or schema activation, significantly improves students' comprehension skills. Therefore, teaching strategies that deliberately link new content to students' prior knowledge are essential, not only for vocabulary development but also for fostering motivation and self-regulated learning.

Implementing clear rules and procedures

Children likely learn best from modeling (Thompson, 1994). The theory underlying the finding in this study is that a well-managed learning environment gave supportive movement to students to regulate their learning. The routines modeled by the teacher help students to have a clear picture of how a particular task should be accomplished. During the teaching and learning, the teacher gave a model by employing the same steps for the same task. The teacher asked students to do the reading, writing, and translating of the story before retelling it. By that time, students would be accustomed to planning strategies to perform well in the task, and they would continue doing well in performing the next task. This finding was also found in the research conducted by Rimm-Kaufman et al. The results showed that among those adaptive behaviors, effective classroom management positively contributed to influencing self-regulation. As was reported by kindergarten children, classrooms with better management practices (i.e., higher productivity, more proactive approaches to classroom management, and more varied approaches to instruction) showed better behavioral and cognitive self-control (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009).

During the learning, implementing clear rules and procedures was also done by the teacher. For the very first place, the teacher had to declare what kind of activities the students will do during their learning, what kind of goals will be reached by doing the activities, and state the role of the teacher and students during the learning. In this RHL setting, the teacher asked the students to be independent in their learning.

> *Green is the second lowest level in this community. So I ask them to read the lesson by themselves, I ask them to translate, and do not let them ask me or anyone every*

single word meaning, they should find them by themselves in a dictionary. And they have to work independently.

This is done to make students accustomed to solving their problems. However, the teacher did not let the students struggle with their learning. They help students by providing learning resources such as a dictionary to help them find the meaning of words. Besides, whenever the students ask a particular word presented in the past form, she lets the students look for the root words in the dictionary. It is because the Green group is not introduced the tenses yet.

During they're doing this task, of course, I lead them and correct them to do their best. Until they present their story. For example when they ask particular vocabulary that is present in past form and they cannot find the meaning in the dictionary, then I will not tell them directly about the meaning of the word but I tell them to look for the meaning of the root word.

As mentioned by Hammer (2007), a teacher needs to play the role of facilitator and guide. In this case, the teacher is not expected to spoon-feed students by providing the answer, but give help through hands-on activity, for example by providing learning sources to find the solution to their problems is worth to do.

Manage disciplinary and provide a clear deadline

The teacher provided three meetings for students to accomplish the task. The first meeting was used for students to choose the book, read the book, and write in their notebooks. The second meeting was used to translate the story with the help of a dictionary. In this step, students can choose either to list the difficult words only to be translated, or they can translate every single word and write it down in their book. In this meeting, students also practiced retelling the story by memorizing the story. Then at the last meeting, they had the test by retelling a story in front of their friends. This deadline was set by the teacher to create students' discipline and responsibility in their learning. This clear deadline also motivated students to perform the task well because, as stated by Bronson (2000), students, especially children, are highly dependent on the external environment that keeps them on track, such as by providing clear deadlines for their self-control and work habits.

Not only does the teacher provide a clear deadline for students to accomplish their tasks, but the teacher also sets clear classroom management by managing students' discipline. Involving them in creating a comfortable space for learning was found during the classroom observation. Students are invited to arrange their seats by themselves as well as disarrange them when the class ends. They were also responsible for the book they read and made sure to return it to its place. As Hammer said that establishing a good rapport between teacher and students could be done through how the teacher treats the students in a classroom (Hammer 2007). Giving trust to children by involving them in creating a good space for learning might invite students' good perceptions of their teacher. They feel safe having interactions with the teacher, not only during the learning but also outside the learning hours. Therefore, a good rapport was established.

Providing meaningful feedback

Feedback is important in learning. Providing constructive and meaningful feedback activates students' motivational beliefs. The teacher provided feedback during the task accomplishment and demonstration. The teacher guided and controlled the students' work in each step. Then, she will give constructive feedback, for example, in terms of language input when the students made errors in pronunciation, misspelling, or when they had difficulties in finding a word's meaning. Meanwhile, in the task demonstration (telling a story), to not distract students' performance, the feedback was given after the students finished the performance. The teacher did corrections and reinforcement for students. The teacher also invited other students to ask about the story that had just been delivered. It was done to ensure that the performance got the audience's attention. Through this, the students feel supported not only by the teacher but also by their friends. Besides, the teacher sometimes invited other people or guests to watch their performance.

> *Even sometimes I invite some people their parents, or some teachers in international school to watch how they retell the story….. So far they do it good. I can see they are very brave. That's why one of the goals of this task is to make them brave to speak in public.*

These showed that the supportive climate provided by the teacher built students' self-confidence and courage, as well as maintained students' intrinsic motivation to keep learning.

Seeing mistakes as a part of learning

Students feel safe in their learning if their environment supports their learning. During the teaching, the teacher encouraged students to learn from their mistakes by providing another chance for students to perform again. It will maintain students' motivation to learn because this teacher's support will transform into the intrinsic motivation of students. As it is stated by Brown (2001), students' behavior in learning is built by motivation from within. These findings are also confirmed by Perry (1998), who stated that a highly supportive teacher helps students cope with their failure and encourages them to be better in the next performance.

> *I will correct them after they have done retelling the story, allow them to correct them, and give them chance to try to fix their performance at the next meeting until they can perform perfectly*

The chance given by the teacher was used by students to fix their mistakes, especially in vocabulary building and pronunciation. The students were reported to perform better at the next meeting. Therefore, it is proven that this support from the teacher will help their learning to be successful in the future.

Being caring and open to students' needs and emotions

One of the key challenges highlighted during the interview is the diversity among students. These differences span across various aspects, including family backgrounds, learning needs, individual challenges, and levels of academic readiness. Such diversity underscores the crucial role of teachers as empathetic and attentive listeners. By genuinely understanding each student's unique circumstances and learning preferences, teachers can create more meaningful and inclusive learning experiences. As one teacher insightfully noted in the interview, addressing these differences begins with the simple yet powerful act of listening.

> *Of course, I found some challenges in teaching these children, but not too many. They come from an underprivileged environment and formal school which is lack English learning support. That is why I need to do more effort in preparing and delivering the materials.*

For children, caring and attention from the teacher are motivations (Lv, 2024) (Wahyuningsih et al., 2024). In a huge class with only one teacher, of course, it is difficult to fulfill every single child's need, which is also varied and different. As Hammer said, listening to students creates rapport with students. As an educator, the teacher should be an active listener who responds to their needs and emotions in learning. Besides, Active listening creates a safe and respectful learning environment, encouraging students to express themselves freely and engage more deeply in the learning process (Paramole et al., 2024)

In coping with this issue, the teacher divided the students based on competencies. She also gave different levels of task difficulties to the different groups. She set different learning goals for the different levels of students. For example, in the storytelling task, the teacher also emphasized the use of tenses in the higher group, while the green group did not. She also required the higher group (black group) to retell the stories based on their own words, while the green group did memorization in telling the stories. This level differentiation is done to fulfill students' different needs in learning English.

Besides, when coping with students of high diversity, the teacher should vary the teaching methods and techniques to cover all students' needs. A teacher also needs to understand that giving emotional support to the students will build their sense of belonging in their learning, and as a result, it will maintain students' motivation.

> *Of course in this learning activity, I have my way. Because for me, every child has different capabilities, and different competencies, so I have to create something interesting for them, so it makes them interested to come. For example games. And I let them choose what they want to do to learn*

The teacher's statement reflects an understanding of the importance of student-centered learning and differentiated instruction in supporting diverse learners. By recognizing that every student has different capabilities and competencies, the teacher actively adapts their approach to make learning more engaging and meaningful. Incorporating games and allowing students to choose their preferred learning activities are strategies that promote autonomy, motivation, and ownership in the learning process.

This practice is in line with Tomlinson's (2005) concept of *differentiated instruction*, which emphasizes the need for teachers to modify content, process, and product based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Furthermore, allowing students to make choices in their learning has been shown to enhance self-regulated learning, as it helps them develop a sense of control and responsibility over their academic progress (Zimmerman, 2009). In addition, student choice and game-based activities have been found to increase engagement and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), both of which are critical for long-term learning success.

CONCLUSIONS

This study attempts to give empirical support for self-regulated learning done by young learners, especially primary students. By providing supportive data through observation and interview, this study qualitatively describes how teaching quality done by the teacher promotes self-regulation in children at one English learning community, Rita Home Library. The predictors of teaching quality were cognitive activation, supportive climate, and classroom management that qualitatively support self-regulation for students. Nonetheless, some predictors, such as activating students' background knowledge and reflection sessions, did not portray the teacher's teaching quality. Furthermore, these findings did not generalize to the self-regulation of all the children at Rita Home Library. It is due to the participants being observed only focusing on the 5 primary students. This study also limits the predictors of self-regulated learning that happen during the learning process, especially the interaction between students and teachers in the community. As a result, another interaction happens to children learning, for example, between students and their parents, which cannot be observed. Therefore, it is recommended for future research to investigate primary students' self-regulated learning that measures not only the predictors in the classroom context but also in an informal situation, such as when students interact or do the learning at home, by employing parents' reports and observation.

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