

# A framework for self-regulated learning in an ESOL classroom

By Jennifer Gilbert, Canada

It is the end of the 2022-2023 academic school year and grade level teams are gathering to begin their annual data dive. Inspecting English language learner (ELL) results is on the agenda. With just over 50% of Toronto District School Board's K-12 population being deemed an ELL (tdsb.on.ca, 2023), supporting the academic achievement of this demographic is a priority. A question is posed amongst the team leaders: How do we boost an ELL's language acquisition and content learning in our classrooms while still keeping the learning standards intact? The answer may lie with the inclusion of ELL-targeted self-regulated learning strategies.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is certainly not a new concept, for it was first introduced by Zimmerman in 1986 (Panadero, 2017). Many theorists have expounded on his initial work, but extremely few resources can be found on its impact on language acquisition. In a recent study, Pokharna (2021) defines SRL for students learning another language as “the process during which learners proactively use strategies to improve a specific language skill by managing their learning activities in order to achieve language learning goals” (p. 25). SRL strategies take a cyclical nature that begins with setting goals for learning, monitoring the progress towards the goals, and finally, self-assessing outcomes (Cousins et al., 2022; Pokharna, 2021). After the final stage has taken place, the process recycles with new goals set in place. Despite vast positive research on the benefits of SRL on students' academic achievement, Cousins et al. point out that “many individuals are not engaging in adequate self-regulation of learning and are unlikely to improve on their own” (2022, p. 1). This supports the case for explicit instruction on effective SRL strategies for students of all ages and all diversity; as Toro points out, “research shows that the majority of students do not learn SRL skills on their own” (Edutopia.org, 2021).

Based on the positive research outcomes of SRL and student learning, and the need for explicit instruction on this valuable tool, this article strives to provide a framework for implementing the use of SRL in K-12 ESOL classrooms. In particular, the suggested framework is targeted towards ELLs who have either entered fossilization in English, are deemed long-term ELLs, or ELL students needing additional motivation to



improve their English language. It can also be used for emergent level multilingual learners, with additional first language support. It is hypothesized that through strategic and language specific SRL, ELLs will boost their language acquisition to move through higher language proficiency levels, similar to the outcomes of Azatova's (2021) research. An additional benefit of incorporating this framework is predicted to be the creation of a mastery-goal oriented classroom, which increases student engagement.

## A suggested ELL SRL framework

Self-regulated learning involves three phases that use cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The proposed SRL framework for language learning is based on Zimmerman's 2002 model and encompasses individual domain-specific language goal setting as phase 1, self-monitoring progress towards specific pre-set language goals as phase 2, and self-assessment of learning as phase 3 (Cousins et al., 2022, p. 2). Each phase presented will consist of suggested activities that will target the objectives of that phase. The activities will use an 'I do, we do, you do' instructional method, to support explicit instruction of SRL strategies. Once again, "students must be taught to goal-set, monitor, and reflect on their performance" (Azatova, 2021, p. 188).

### Phase 1: Domain-specific language goal setting

In order for students to choose where they want to be heading with language proficiency, they must first know where they are at. In phase 1, students must be made aware of their current language skills in all four domains (speaking, listening, reading, writing). This will eliminate potential inflated or under-inflated self-awareness and ensure accuracy in goal setting. To begin this process, it is recommended to present to each ELL their current language level descriptors as outlined by their most recent proficiency test or diagnostic test results. Most school districts use some form of criterion-referenced assessments and screeners to categorize a student's language proficiency and for classroom placement. By explaining what each descriptor means and providing authentic examples of each level, a student can successfully pinpoint their current language proficiency. This can be facilitated by projecting the language descriptors by level on a smart board, meanwhile each ELL has their respective results in front of them to follow along with. In an emergent level classroom, it is recommended to have the descriptors available in the student's L1. The authentic examples can then be projected on a gradient scale so that students can both see their current level and what the next level looks like.

Once students are made aware of their current proficiency level, they can begin setting goals for their language learning. In this step, it is recommended that students be explicitly taught how to set quantifiable and measurable goals. This can be done by providing a language goal bank for students to choose their goals from, similar to a word bank, or as a collaborative effort between the student-teacher or between



student-student. As students enter upper-elementary and higher grade levels, the s.m.a.r.t. goal setting format can be taught, and students can be encouraged to create their own goals. Activating prior goal-setting knowledge and presenting an ELL and kid-friendly video explaining s.m.a.r.t. goal setting, such as one from Khan Academy (2023), is a good place to start. As a reminder, pre-teaching tier II vocabulary is suggested. An important component of this phase of SRL to remember is that students must be the creators of their goals. To increase student motivation and engagement in their goals, expectancy-value theory explains that students need to have perceived self-efficacy and perceived value in the task (Wery & Thomson, 2013, p. 103). Choosing and/or creating their own goals will satisfy both of those engagement components.

## **Phase 2: Monitoring progress towards goal**

Once individual goals have been set, a student is ready to enter phase 2. Monitoring progress towards goals can be facilitated in numerous ways. From a simple manila folder that students can graph daily measurables, to portfolios that track learning over time, journaling, and the use of technology such as Google sheets and self-made videos are some examples. If a pre-set goal of increasing personal vocabulary by 100 words is the objective, then an example of monitoring could be placing a checkmark in a box beside the learned work every time a student uses the word correctly either in writing or orally. Additionally, every time they read the word or hear the word used correctly, they could put a checkmark. They would keep track of this themselves. After they have used the word correctly approximately 10–15 times in a variety of scenarios, as evidenced by their checkmarks, the word would be deemed as learned (Shanahan, 2016). The most important thing to remember in this phase is that monitoring should occur often and be measurable. It is recommended to monitor daily, so one does not lose sight of their goals.

One more recommendation to note is that goals work best when they are visible and reviewed often. To facilitate this, students could tape their goals on their desks so that they are easily accessible. Time could also be permitted at the beginning of the day, to review the goals within their seating group as a think-pair-share opener. Students would review their goals, choose one they want to work on that day, and share it with a partner. A teacher could then use equity sticks to select a few students to vocalize their daily goal to the whole class. Periodic formative assessments such as exit tickets could also facilitate goal-monitoring. Asking students to write out how they worked on a goal in their journal or on a Google form is a suggestion to track progress.

## **Phase 3: Self-assessment of learning and attitudes**

The final stage before the SRL cycle begins again is self-assessment. Reflecting on achievement and effort is important for a student to become an efficient and autonomous language learner. When it comes to



language acquisition, Sheehan points out research from Little (2011), and states that self-assessments “have the potential to promote a greater understanding of the processes of language learning because it allows learners to set language goals and to select appropriate language learning strategies” (2019, p. 5). In this phase, it is recommended that an educator explicitly model how to self-assess, for this is not an inherently learnt skill. Examples that teachers can use as self-assessments include but are not limited to: surveys using Likert scales, reflection journals using evidence, video diaries, and student-led conferences.

## Conclusion

Research supports the use of self-regulating learning strategies to enhance language acquisition (Azatova, 2022; Pokharna, 2021). Positive outcomes have been reported on students’ academic achievement and lifelong skills. Despite the evidence, Cousins et al. explain that “there is a need for more SRL support in our K-12 schools” (2022, p. 20). It was also noted that SRL strategies work best when explicitly taught to students. This paper presented a user-friendly framework to incorporate SRL into an ESOL classroom and presented a variety of ways for educators to explicitly instruct SRL in each phase. Infusing SRL into an ESOL classroom shows evidence of boosting students’ language acquisition. Aren’t those words every educator wants to hear?

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### Author Bio



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