

The Motivational Role of Adaptive Help Seeking in Self-Regulated Learning

eTale 2022



When students work independently, monitor task performance, and recognise difficulties they cannot overcome on their own, requesting assistance from a more knowledgeable individual can be an adaptive learning strategy. In this chapter, the academic help-seeking literature is briefly reviewed then contrasted with several types of nonadaptive actions in which students often engage when they encounter academic difficulty. Further, practical concerns of teachers are addressed, particularly on how to support student efforts at adaptive help seeking.

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Source: Newman, R.S. (2008). The motivational role of adaptive help seeking in self-regulated learning. Chapter 13 in the book *Motivation and self-regulated learning. Theory, research, and applications* edited by Dale E. Schunk & Barry J. Zimmerman (Routledge, Taylor, & Francis Group).

An important aspect of the learning process is asking questions about material one does not understand. When students work independently, monitor task performance, and recognise difficulties they cannot overcome on their own, requesting assistance from a more knowledgeable individual can

be considered an adaptive learning strategy. In this chapter, academic help-seeking literature is briefly reviewed then contrasted with several types of nonadaptive actions in which students often engage when they encounter academic difficulty. Any practical concerns of teachers, particularly how to support students' efforts at adaptive help seeking, are also addressed.

- Adaptive help seeking is a strategy of self-regulated learning.
- Adaptive help seeking is a goal-directed and intentional action that mediates the relationship between academic difficulty and successful task completion.
- Adaptive help seeking is social—it involves other people.
- According to Vygotsky (1978), a child's cognitive development is necessarily linked to social influences. The young child is an active participant in social interactions with adults, who provide needed assistance and gradually wean the child off unneeded assistance. In time, the child adopts the adult's regulating role.
- This developmental process has been described as a transition from other-regulation to self-regulation.
- Faced with difficult tasks, learners may require assistance from someone more knowledgeable than themselves.
- An important aspect of self-regulation is knowing when it is necessary to fall back to other-regulation.
- Individuals can alternate between depending on others, gradually developing independence, pushing oneself toward self-sufficiency, asking an expert for further assistance, and pushing oneself to new limits when necessary.
- Willingness to depend on others over a lifespan is a marker of cognitive, social, and emotional maturity.

Adaptive help seekers carefully consider three sets of

questions:

1. Necessity of the request, for example

- What exactly don't I understand?
- What do I understand?
- Have I tried to do the assignment on my own?

2. Content of the request, for example

- What exactly should I ask for?
- Should I raise my hand?

3. Target of the request, for example

- Whom should I ask?
- Who is most likely to know the answer?
- Who is least likely to make me feel "dumb"?

Adaptive help seekers possess the following intrapersonal, affective-motivational, and self-system resources:

1. Goals (such as desire to learn)

2. Self-beliefs (such as self-efficacy and perceived competence)

3. Emotions (such as self-esteem that allows one to admit to others his or her limitations)

Operationalising adaptive help seeking

- Adaptive help seeking is restricted to occasions when assistance is actually required.
- With age and knowledge, students become increasingly aware of when their knowledge is lacking, comprehension is incomplete, or they are confused.
- Help seeking following initial failure can be interpreted as appropriate (or necessary), whereas help seeking following an initial solution that is correct is

inappropriate (or unnecessary).

- Some studies about Grade 3 and 5 students found that Grade 3 students tended to make more unnecessary requests for help than Grade 5 students. Further, Grade 5 students with relatively poor vocabulary asked significantly more unnecessary questions compared to classmates with good vocabulary.
- Asking for a hint is indicative of 'instrumental' help seeking (indicating a desire to clarify or refine current knowledge), whereas asking for a direct answer is indicative of 'executive' help seeking (indicating either a lack of knowledge or desire for expedient task completion).
- Among more experienced learners, there is evidence of adaptiveness being operationalised according to matching specific types of request to perceived needs.
- Older children take more time before requesting help compared to younger children, suggesting more perseverance in the face of difficulty.
- Students with learning goals are more interested in obtaining feedback about the correctness of their work. In contrast, students with performance goals are more likely to seek help in seemingly nonadaptive ways, such as by immediately asking for help when it may not be necessary or failing to ask help when it is necessary.

What can teachers do?

Teacher-student involvement

- In classrooms where teachers are nurturing and share their time and energy, students tend to be attentive, effortful, self-expressive, and interested in learning.
- Teachers perceived as caring are able to adopt the child's perspective, understand their thinking, and guide their learning appropriately.
- Caring teachers tend to listen, ask questions, enquire if students need help, make sure students understand

difficult material, and provide help in a nonthreatening way.

Support for autonomy

- An important way in which teachers can support autonomy and facilitate adaptive help seeking involves the achievement goals teachers establish in their classroom.
- When they emphasise the importance of long-term mastery, autonomy, and the intrinsic value of learning, teachers foster classroom learning goals.
- Teachers can show students the benefits of carefully monitoring their performance and requesting information and feedback that focus on their exact needs.

Support for competence

- It is important that students respect (rather than criticise) peers who ask for assistance.
- Explicitly encouraging students to use the help that is given to them strategically (such as returning to an incorrect solution and trying to solve the problem again) may help children monitor their understanding continually, determine if they need further assistance, and iteratively request help in increasingly explicit, precise, and direct ways.
- When teachers demonstrate that dilemmas and uncertainty can be tolerated (perhaps even shared and transformed into intellectual challenges), students may realise it is normal not to be able to solve all problems independently.
- Teachers can support adaptive help seeking by helping students assess specific learning situations to determine the particular person who is most likely to meet their particular needs.