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Who Governs Your Learning? Perceptions of Adult Students in Online Higher Education

Maria De Fátima Goulão

Universidade Aberta, Portugal

Abstract

Based on the assumptions of self-regulated learning and metacognition as key competences in higher education, this study analyses the perceptions of adult online students about the governance of their own learning. The research sought to answer the question: ‘Who governs your learning?’

The methodology used was qualitative thematic analysis. The sample consisted of 166 written statements from adult university students, collected in the context of a pedagogical training course.

The results revealed six major themes: individual responsibility, self-regulation and time management, motivation, purpose and meaning, personal challenges and obstacles, the influence of context and others, and metacognition and personal development. Most participants recognise themselves as the main agents of their learning path, valuing autonomy and discipline, but also mentioning conditioning factors such as procrastination, tiredness, and external demands. The significant presence of metacognitive practices and reflection points to a high degree of awareness of the learning process. The conclusion is that although the governance of learning is mostly self-reported, it occurs in a balance between self-determination and contextual influence.

The data reinforces the importance of promoting self-regulation skills and strategies to support autonomous learning, especially in online contexts, where the active role of the student is even more decisive for academic success.

Keywords: Self-Regulation of Learning; Metacognition; University Students; Higher Education; Thematic Analysis