



Self-regulation for students with ALN (Additional Learning needs) in WALES, UK



Introduction

- A learner has Additional Learning Needs (ALN) if he/she;
 - has learning difficult (s) that is either medical related or otherwise requiring provision of ALN,
 - has a significant greater learning difficulty when compared with majority of the peers, or has disability that hinders utilization of educational facilities provided for peers (Education Tribunal (Wales) Act, 2018; Equality Act, 2010).
- In Wales, approximately one in every four children is reported to have ALN at some time in their lifetime (Knight et al., 2025).
Policy implication: underpins the need for early intervention to prevent children with ALN falling behind peers.



Evaluation of Self-Regulation

- For optimal learning, self-regulation operationalised as the ability of the learners to manage thoughts, emotions, and their behaviours to attain goals (McClelland et al., 2017) is critical in bridging the gaps occasioned by learning difficulties.
- In line with ALN transformations 2022 (Education Tribunal (Wales) (2018) Act, schools must identify needs early, develop tailored Individual Development Plans (IDPs), and involve families in decision-making to enable learners with ALN to attain their optimal potential.

Development of Self-Regulations Skills

While handling a task, a learner can utilise various steps to develop self-regulation skills:

- (1) practicing a simple routine
- (2) Deep breathing
- (3) emotional journaling
- (4) mindfulness



Source: Barnes et al. (2008)



Supporting Students with ALN

- The Welsh government through Children Young People and Education Committee reports that since the replacement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) with new ALN system in September 2022, there has been a reduction by 44% in the number of learners having ALN (Wightwick, 2024).
 - The government attributes this reduction to the removal of learners from SEN/ALN registers whose needs can now be met through universal or holistic provision.
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Supporting Self-regulated Learning

Learning difficulties can interfere with the innate capabilities (emotions, thoughts) and behaviors of the of learners.

Teachers should support learners to develop skills that include setting actionable goals and reflection that foster self-regulated learning.

Source: Roberts et al. (2019)





Challenges Facing ALN

Despite the government reporting a reduction in the number of learners having ALN through its IDPs reforms, Estyn, the school watchdog, warns on three challenges facing ALN reforms:

- Inconsistences in ALN code interpretation, notably, IDPs development.
- Variations in the guidance quality given by local authorities in regard to inclusivity in learning and teaching.
- Limited equitable resource provision to medium ALN learners.

These challenges may be counterproductive to the gains made.



Representation of ALN in Official Statements

- Through official directives, the government of Wales has encouraged schools to adopt the student-centered system to foster self-regulation in learners with ALN.
 - In this regard, the government has recommended that the progress of learners with ALN be documented in the progress reports. This provides a measurable tool to assess their development of self-regulation skills.
 - Estyn further acknowledges the need for schools to nurture development of wellbeing and emotional resilience skills in learners with ALN.
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Media treatment of ANL Issue

- The National and Local Welsh Media which include BBC Wales and Local Newspapers often focus on the struggles parents and schools undergo while handling students with ALN develop self-regulations skills.
 - In the social media forums that include Facebook, parents/carers share lived experience they face whilst nurturing self-regulation skills in their children with ALN (Henderson, 2022).
 - Particularly, they share their frustrations (i.e., lengthy delays in need assessment, inconsistencies in the application process). This points out the gap between lived experiences and ALN Act (2018) policy framework. There is need for the government to bridge these gaps.
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Understanding of ALN Treatment in an International Context

- In the global view, Finland's system, for instance, has adopted collaborative and smaller class sizes that foster teachers to nurture holistic and self-regulatory skills in learners with ALN.
- Moreover, in the US, there are various programmes run by educational specialists that include Zones of Regulation that help in teaching students having ALN self-regulation skills.
- The international systems provides valuable insights and alternative model. Wales systems heavily delegated on Teacher Assistants who are often inexperienced (Henderson, 2022). Involving specialists may help bridge the gaps.



Conclusion

- It is vital that learners having ALN develop self-regulation skills to proactively manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours critical in coping with learning environment challenges.
- Through scaffolded and supportive learning, learners with ALN will be able to overcome the learning barriers.
- Consequently, the Wales government should work alongside authorities (schools and councils) to ensure IDPs reforms are universally implemented.



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