



---

## SHOULD STUDENTS DECIDE WHAT TO PRACTICE?

### What New Research Says About Learner Control and Progress Tracking

Excellent Educator, 3(11), 1-2, 2026

---

#### WHAT RESEARCH FOUND

Many digital learning systems automatically decide what students should practice next. While this can improve efficiency, it may also reduce opportunities for students to develop ownership of learning. A recent study explored how middle school students responded when they were given different levels of control over practice activities in a tutoring system.

Most students preferred having some degree of choice rather than allowing the system to make all decisions. Students often selected activities that addressed perceived weaknesses. However, when visual explanations were available, they also paid attention to skills that were close to mastery and made more balanced learning decisions. The findings suggest that when students understand their progress and the likely impact of different practice choices, they become more thoughtful and strategic learners.

---

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

Schools increasingly expect students to become self-directed learners who can monitor and improve their own learning. Yet many classroom routines leave important decisions entirely to teachers or software systems. This research suggests that student ownership grows when learners understand their progress and participate in decisions about what to practice next.

#### CLASSROOM REALITY

Teachers Want	Students Often Experience
Independent learners	Constant teacher direction
Self-regulation	Dependence on reminders
Ownership of learning	Assigned practice only
Reflection	Task completion focus



# EXCELLENT EDUCATOR | Classroom Briefs

Research interpreted for real classroom

Theme: What Actually Helps Students Learn? Volume 3-11, 2026

ISSN: 3048-9121 (Online) [excellenteducator.org](http://excellenteducator.org)

---

## TRY TOMORROW

Before independent practice:

1. Show students a simple progress tracker.
  2. Offer two or three practice options.
  3. Ask students to explain their choice.
- 

## CAUTION

More choice is not always better. Students benefit most when choices are supported by clear information about learning progress.

---

## ONE KEY TAKEAWAY

**Students may make more informed learning decisions when they can see their progress and have a voice in practice choices.**

---

**Keywords:** learner control, self-regulated learning, student agency, mastery learning

**Reference:**

Borchers, C., Ooge, J., Peng, C., & Aleven, V. (2025). *How learner control and explainable learning analytics about skill mastery shape student desires to finish and avoid loss in tutored practice.*