# Measuring student success skills

A review of the literature on student agency

Student agency is a central skill in today's information age. As technology continues to accelerate learning expectations and drive change, the ability to make independent decisions, self-regulate and adapt to complex, evolving environments becomes essential. The World Economic Forum highlights the importance of skills like resilience, flexibility, agility, motivation and self-awareness—key skills associated with student agency—for success in the workforce.
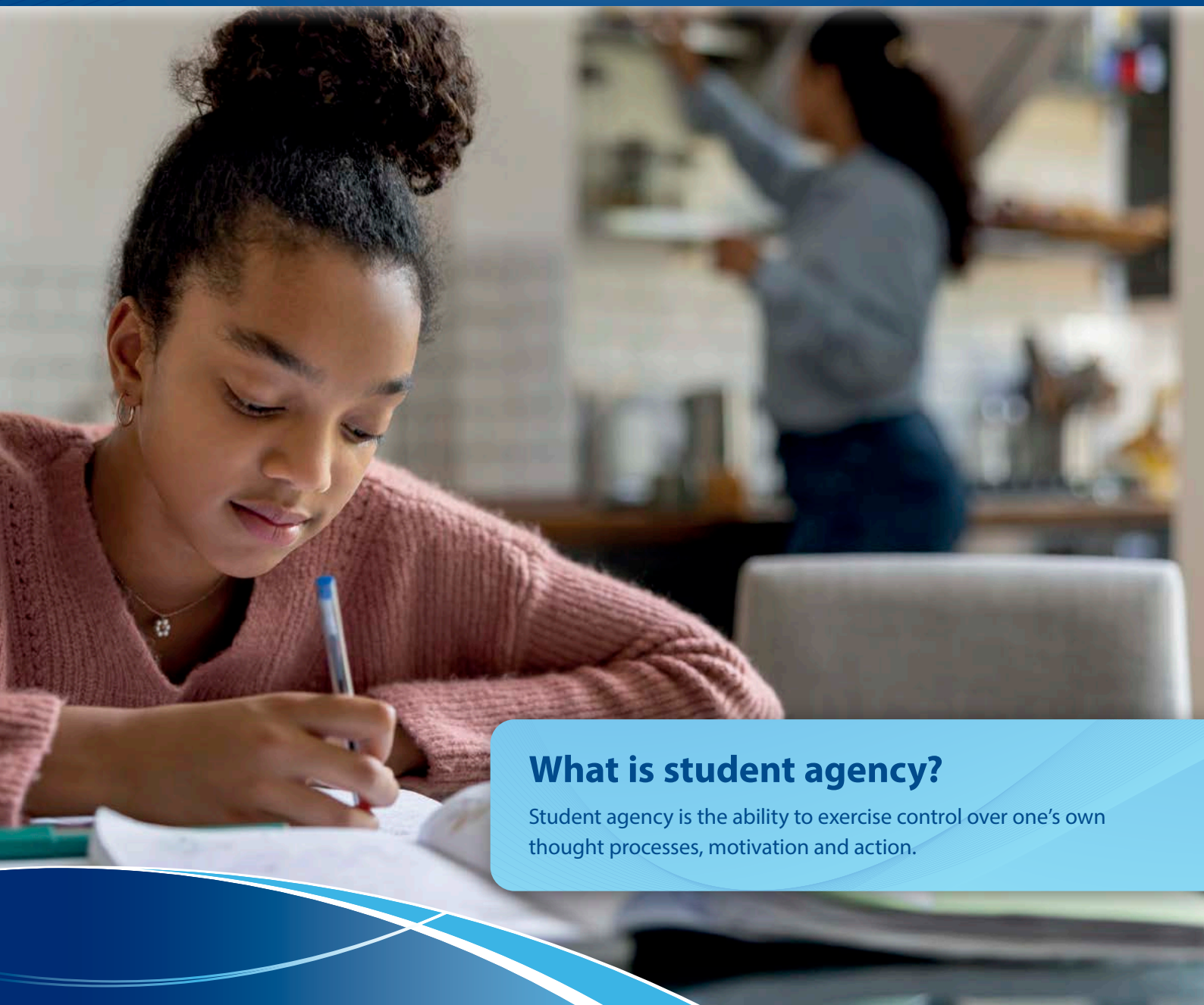
What is student agency?

Student agency is the ability to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation and action.

Is student agency generic or domain specific?

Student agency manifests across different domains in both generic and domain-specific ways. Students can practise and strengthen their agency in a range of subject domains and learning environments by setting goals, creating plans, monitoring progress, adapting to setbacks, reflecting and evaluating their learning experiences. Content knowledge and task complexity also influence how student agency is expressed. For example, a student with limited domain knowledge may struggle to complete a task regardless of how strong their planning skills are.

However, there is limited evidence on how student agency specifically manifests across different academic domains. More research is needed to fully understand how student agency varies across learning contexts and how fostering agency in one domain might transfer to others.

How do children develop student agency over time?

Agency develops through a reciprocal relationship that occurs across environmental factors, personal factors and observed behaviours.

- **Environmental factors** represent the social influences, cultural norms and situational contexts that influence behaviour. In a school setting, positive environmental influences include social and emotional support from adults and peers, effective pedagogy, access to high-quality instructional materials, and a positive school culture and climate.

- **Personal factors** include student cognition, which involves internal processing mechanisms—like working memory, mental flexibility and self-control—that support the learning process. Other personal factors include a student's knowledge and skills, and their ability to self-regulate.

- **Observed behaviours** represent the observable choices and practices that students engage in to demonstrate agency. Behavioural actions may include goal setting, seeking feedback, initiating collaboration with peers, or reflecting on their own performance.

How is student agency influenced by culture?

Concepts of student agency vary across contexts, regions and cultures, with no global consensus on the definition of student agency in educational settings. Although research studies have attempted to group definitions and frameworks of agency into conceptual categories, a shared understanding of student agency does not yet exist. Cultural differences in defining and prioritizing harmony, individualism and personal autonomy influence these conceptualizations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development concludes that while a universally applicable definition is unlikely, student agency plays an important role in shaping educational experiences worldwide.

What does the research say about effective student agency instructional strategies?

There are few studies that specifically examine the effects of school-based interventions on student agency in primary and secondary schools. Instead, most focus on elements that correlate with student agency, such as academic performance, collaboration and attitudes towards schooling. Studies show promising relationships between a variety of instructional interventions and outcomes related to student agency, such as self-efficacy, motivation, academic performance and positive attitudes toward learning, although more research is needed.

How can student agency be measured and assessed?

Student agency may be assessed in a variety of ways, such as via standardized self-report measures and performance-based assessments. However, there are challenges in defining and assessing agency due to varying definitions, mediating factors and questions about how the construct develops over time.