Self-Directed Learning: A Pathway to Success for Lifelong Learning

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Present study is an effort to discuss the evolution of the concept of self-directed learning and its importance in life-long learning. Today self-directed learning emerged as the most significant element in rethinking education especially adult education and professional education in the perspective of life-long learning. Self-directed learning has been identified as an important skill for higher/adult education. To meet the challenges posed by exponential growth of knowledge in today's knowledge society self-directed learning is the best strategy for the survival and growth. In today's education system the main purpose of education is 'a student must know to develop the skills of inquiry, and more importantly to keep on acquiring knowledge smartly and skillfully for the rest of the life'. It has become imperative for the institutions related to higher education to understand the need of the learners so as to minimize the number of dropouts. In higher education students spend a considerable time in collecting and acquiring information and learning new skills. The rapid pace of technological change and accelerated growth of knowledge are placing a premium on the person's capability for self-directed learning. So, for the successful survival with full well-being in the present society continuous and lifelong learning is very important. For a person to live a contended, engaged, effective and productive life he has to constantly go with the pace of change which knowledge and information brings to him. Therefore, to continue learning independently throughout life, one must be self-regulated and self-directed.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Adult Education and Life-Long Learning.

Introduction

Learning is a cognitive process and plays a pivotal role in everyone's life. It is responsible for structuring the behavior and personality of a person. As it is generally assumed that the purpose of learning is to incorporate new information or skills into the learner's existing knowledge structure and to make that knowledge easily accessible. It brings about a relatively permanent change in the behaviour of a learner by increasing capacity, knowledge or skills. Learning can be described as an ongoing process where learner interacts actively with the new information and develops new cognitive structures to incorporate new knowledge and information (Bruner, 1966, 1996).

Doing well for current and future success learners/students need to be organized, self-regulated and self-directed. But many of the students don't seem to know how to take charge of their own learning. When any assignment is given they have trouble in completing that and many of them even wait until the last minute. Sometimes they even can't organize their work because they can't decide what is most important for them. Bandura said – "we have to take charge of our own learning. Self-directed learning is an essential means of academic self-development, not a theoretical abstraction. The content of courses is perishable, but self-regulatory skills have lasting functional value whatever the pursuit might be". (Woolfolk et al. 2012).

In the olden times teacher was the key holder of knowledge, but now a days with easily accessible information that key is holding by computer and teacher is just a facilitator of knowledge, who helps the learner to plan, explore, judge and organize the information in the learning process. Now learning is no longer confined to physical location of the learner rather it can take place anytime, anywhere where there internet is easily accessible. In the light of these advancements it is essential to redefine the basic skills.

The present century is the century of knowledge, with a focus to explore the knowledge and information which is available to us today and which can be generated continuously at a very fast pace. Because of this exponential growth in knowledge teacher tries, but cannot teach a student everything that he/she is expected to learn. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that learning in an academic setting cannot acquaint us with the knowledge of everything that is essential and even a person cannot afford to be contented only with the learning of few things during his/her educational career. Self-learning or self-directed learning (as it is presently called) offers a ray of hope for achieving the goals of education. The learner focuses his attention on what is to be learnt? His prior knowledge supports him to recognize what he already knows helps him what to learn and how to learn. Motivation, intention, and readiness/willingness to learn are the factors responsible for initiating learning.

Objectives of the Study

1. To bring into light the constituents of self-directed learning.
2. To highlight the antecedents of self-directed learning
3. To understand the relationship between self-directed learning and life-long learning.

Research Design

This paper aims to discuss in detail the evolution of the concept of self-directed learning and its importance in life-long learning. The secondary method was adopted to cover every aspect of the study and to fulfill the objectives of the study. The secondary data was collected through books, periodicals, journal and published material related to self-directed learning and life-long learning.

Self-directed Learning- Historical Background

During the 1960's the most prominent research study recognized with self-direction in learning in the United States was reported in 1961 by Cyril Houle which laid the foundation for the modern research on self-directed learning. In one of the masterpiece work 'The Inquiring Mind', Houle reported three types of adult learners: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, or learning oriented. During 1970's Malcolm Knowles, bring out the concept of andragogy and pondered that adults are self-directed in various aspects of their lives along with their learning. In 1975 in 'Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers' he explained 'hows' and 'whys' of self-directed learning for learners and learning facilitators. After that Allen Tough (1979) also conducted tremendous research on adult self-learners and studied the learning projects of adults as one of the major contributor to the notion of self-directed learning. Other researchers of 1970's who did their initial work on self-directed learning have repeatedly contributed to research and writing on self-directed learning through the present day are: Hiemstra, Long & Guglielmino (Guglielmino et al., 2004, p. 4).

Defining Self-directed Learning

Varying perspectives on self-directed learning have been discussed since early sixties. In 1993 Piskurich stated that "self-directed learning is a training design in which trainer master packages of predetermined material, at their own pace, without the help of an instructor". Self-directed learning is a form of study in which individuals have primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and even evaluating the efforts. (Hiemstra 1994). Keeping this in mind scholars have come forward with a new technique that can enlighten a person so that he/she can cope up with the pace of a fast moving world. This new method is known as self-directed learning. The perusal of research studies related to self-directed learning revealed that 'self' in Self-directed learning does not necessarily mean learning alone; human resources and material resources also play an important role in providing help for SDL (Caffarella, 1993).

Actually the concept of self-directed learning was originated in the field of adult education (Roberson, 2005). Now a days due to the benefits for better learning outcomes, school settings and, the institutions imparting higher education and corporate settings strongly emphasize the importance of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning has its value as a required skill needed for work in the 21st century (Murane & Levy, 1996).

Self-directed learning is an instructional process centering on activities like- assessing needs, securing learning resources, implementing learning activities and evaluating learning (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). In (1990) Hiemstra & Sisco explained self directed learning as individualizing instruction, a process of focussing on characteristics of the teaching and learning transaction. Knowles (1975) described self-directed learners as proactive who take the initiative in learning rather than passively waiting to be taught as reactive learners. Their learning is more meaningful and purposeful, with greater motivation it results in longer retention. They owe the responsibility of their own lives, benefitting themselves from the self disciplining process of learning. According to Hiemstra (1994) and Brookfield (1986), Self-directed learning is a process in which learners are responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning and are expected to work independently or with others, in order to achieve their pre-set learning goals.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) SDL is a state of learning in which learner owes the responsibility of making all the decisions related to learning, whereas, he further explain that main factors in implementing the decisions are necessarily given by authorities. Smedley (2007) described SDL an approach to learning that relies on flexibility in time and place of learning and entrusts responsibilities of learning to the learner.

In nutshell it can be concluded that self-directed learning has been defined in many different ways by many different scholars over the past several decades. While in these definitions almost all refer self-directed learning as a way of learning in which the learner takes the initiative to plan, direct, and evaluate his or her own learning, often with the assistance of a facilitator or some educational agent.

Explaining Constituents of Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning has traits of a positive attitude of consciousness and internal control that the adult implements in relation to his/her knowledge. Self-directed learning becomes a way of being and living an educative posture that pervades one's existence as whole (Basin, 2008). After Houle (1961) Knowles (1975) gave the strong foundation to self-directed learning. He framed a five step model of Self-directed learning which constitutes (i) to diagnose learning needs (ii) formulation of learning needs, (iii) identification of human material resources for learning, (iv) Choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and (v) evaluation of learning outcomes. Guglielmino (1977) stated that certain learning situations which are more conducive to self-direction in learning are, the personal characteristics of the learner- including his attitudes, values, and his abilities- which ultimately determine whether self-directed learning will take place in a given learning situation. Candy (1991) suggested four distinct but related phenomenon of self –direction (i) personal autonomy (ii) self management (iii) learner control and (iv) autodidaxy.

Long (1989) comprehend that self-directed learning is not a single entity. It is constituted of sociological, pedagogical and psychological dimensions. Sociological aspect includes those activities which one performs while learning, pedagogical aspect addresses the teaching one does to him/herself, whereas, one's control over his learning process refers to psychological aspect of self-directed learning. Grow(1991) in a study, 'teaching learners to be self-directed' explained a staged model of self-directed learning and in each stage he described the role of the teacher and instructional techniques which helps a student in becoming more self-directed.

The Model of Self-Directed Learning

	Student	Teacher	Activities
Stage 1	Dependent	As Coach	Coaching with immediate Feedback, Drill, Informative lectures. Overcome deficiencies and resistance
Stage 2	Interested,	As Motivator and guide	Inspirational lectures, guided discussions, Goal-setting and learning strategies
Stage 3	Involved	As Facilitator	teacher equally participates in discussions and facilitates them, Seminars, Group projects etc.
.Stage 4	Self-directed Consultant,	As Delegator	Internship, dissertation, research, individual work or self-directed study-group.

Source: teachthought.com

Garrison (1997) viewed the fully self-directed adult learner as one who "has moved beyond simple task control and has learned to think critically and construct meaning in ill-defined and complex content areas" (p. 21). He designed a self-directed learning model based on three different dimensions as motivation (entering/task), self-monitoring (responsibility) and self-management (control). He further said that the challenge for teachers is to create an environment which can facilitate learners tapping into personal motivations and resources in order to construct their own deep meaning in a learning situation.

According to Leong (2020) self-directed learning is not primarily about control of learning techniques. A self-directed learner has minimum control over the time, pace, and place for learning. He opined that control of the learning situation is the only one element of self-directed learning, whereas, other elements are the ability and willingness to reflect, critical judgement, and necessary knowledge of alternatives.

By analyzing above discussed research studies about the constituents of self-directed learning we can observe that control, self-awareness, self-motivation, self-evaluation, taking decisions independently and zeal to learn are the crux areas in all the research studies.

Antecedents of Self-directed Learning

Self-direction is the basis of all learning, whether formal, non-formal or informal learning. An individual's motivation decides the effectiveness of learning. Personal responsibility, readiness to learn, personal control, autonomy, personal empowerment, and individual freedom in decision making have been among the ideals and outcomes cited by writers that characterize self-directed learning as a strongly individualistic enterprise (Guglielmino, 1978; Long, 1989, 1990; Candy, 1991; Merriam, 2001).

Mok & Cheng (2001) described cognitive factors, control factors, affective factors, procedural factors and content factors as contributors towards self-directed learning. Cognitive factors comprised of learner's meta-cognition, self understanding and beliefs about learning as well as his or her awareness and understanding of the nature, expectation, the difficulty level of the learning task and the learning context. Control factors include (i) the learner's control of self, (ii) learner's control of learning task which involves intentional effort, commitment, perseverance and willfulness in the learning task and (iii) control of the learning context involves the selection and manipulation of the learning environment (physical, psychological, social and technological), management of learning resources (time, energy, help). The affective factors in self-directed learning include the learner's motivation to learn (Dweck, 1986), attitudes toward learning, learning anxiety, test anxiety as well as the values placed on the learning task and the significance of the learning outcomes (Mok & Lung, 2005).

Oladoke **(**2006**)** examined self-directed learning characteristics in online doctoral learner and revealed that the learners understood self-directed

learning and the mitigators of self-directed learning influence learners' abilities so that they can successfully learn in that environment. The study also found that the doctoral learners possessed self-directed learning characteristics and they apply these characteristics to their learning and further their learning styles, motivation, learner control and convenience of learning online. Huang (2008) studied the relationship between learning approaches and self-directed learning and reported that participants in the 2-year program showed significantly higher score for the Deep Approach and lower scores for the Surface Approach than students in the 4-year program, student in the 2-year program reported a better readiness for SDL than those in the 4-year program. The study revealed that participants with higher mastery or performance goal orientations report higher frequency for adopting deep learning approach & a higher score for SDL readiness.

Mayhew (2008) proposed that transformational leadership is related to self-directed learning readiness and there was no statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership and self-directed learning readiness. The results also indicated that the removal of barriers and an environment conducive to learning (valances) were the only predictors of self-directed learning readiness. Significant relationship between self-directed learning and transformation learning among adults was reported by Hutto (2009). A self-directed learning program using blended coaching is an effective educational approach used to improve the implementation part of self-directed learning competency and clinical practice satisfaction among nursing students in clinical practice (Noh and Kim, 2019).

Kidane, et al (2020) found that certain components of the hybrid curriculum play important role in promoting students' self-directed learning abilities. Age and academic performance showed no significant effect on students' SDL scores. Problem Based Learning tutorial discussion, module objectives and tutors show high influence on students' independent learning and strong correlation with student's SDL ability.

Self-directed Learning as a Path to Success

Self-directed learning emphasis the meta-cognitive processes of the individual for not only the cognitive but for personal growth also. The emphasis is on the autonomy of the learning process not as a technique to know more or know better, but manifests as consciousness of one's own expectations and perspectives on the different contexts of life (Quaglino, 2004). Self-directed learning is a capacity of the individual which enlighten him/her to know how to interact with various levels of influence to get benefit for positive and constructive personal growth with respect to socio-relational, scholastic and professional environments.

Wiley (1983) examined that students with preferences for high levels of structure when subjected to an SDL project, score low in SDL readiness, whereas, those students who prefer low structure and were subjected to an SDL project score

high in SDL readiness. In another study by O' Kell's (1988) students who scored low in SDL readiness preferred more teacher–led discussion, demonstration and lectures rather than independent projects, case studies and private tutorials. Over direction or under direction from the teacher results in negative experience (Richardson, 1988**).** Students who have low readiness for SDL were when exposed to an SDL project, exhibit high level of anxiety and similarly those learners with a high readiness for SDL who were exposed to increasing levels of teacher direction also exhibit high anxiety levels. (Grow 1991, Wiley 1983). In a research study Carpenter **(**2011) reported that in the online section students with high self-direction outperformed as compared to those with low self-direction, whereas in the face-to-face section the converse result was found. The results also revealed the lower performance of highly self-directed students in the face-to-face classroom.

Various research studies observed the significant relationship between self-directed learning readiness and academic performance (Anderson, 1993; Darmayanti,1994; Morris**,** 1995 ; Hsu and Shine, 2005; Tsai, 2005; Hall**,** 2011; Klotz**,** 2011 and Carson**,** 2012) and further reported that prediction can be made about academic success by self-directed learning readiness. On the contrary a study reported that there was no significant relationship between self-directed learning and academic success (Pachnowski and Jurczyk, 2000). Significant connection observed between the students' learning styles and the variables of their readiness for self-directed learning (Aljohani and Fadila, 2018). Some of the research studies concluded that university students of arts stream showed low self-directed learning score as compared to science and professional groups. Students of professional stream showed high self-directed learning score than others. Female university students showed high self-directed learning score than male students. Students having high academic achievement showed significantly high self-directed learning score as compared to the students having low academic achievement (Gupta 2013; Kaur 2014).

Candy (2003) was of the view that much can be learned from the experiences, interests and priorities of self-directed learners and that can further be applied for supporting the learning efforts of those engaged in more formal studies. As far as attitude towards pedagogical approaches is concerned a research study by Lam (2004) indicated that students with high self-directed learning readiness prefer more self-directedness pedagogical approach, while students with a low degree of self-directed learning readiness prefer less self-directedness pedagogical approach.

In a research study on university students Mehmet (2020) observed that self-leadership has moderate and positive correlation with self-directed learning and online learning; self-directed learning also showed a moderate and positive correlation with online learning. Self-directed learning worked as a mediator in the relationship between self-leadership and online learning.

The self-directed learning approach is the determinant impeding or assisting the development of the individual's capacity for self-determination in learning, and more generally, in life itself. It is one of the pillars for ones' successful educational career. A moderate positive relationship was detected between self-directed learning skills and lifelong learning tendencies (Aşkin Tekkol and Demirel, 2018). Kidane, et al (2020) described Self-directed learning (SDL) as an appropriate and preferred learning process which prepare students for lifelong learning in their professions and also make them stay up-to-date.

Research Studies Promoting Self-directed Learning

In the present time when information and technology has accelerated the rate of change in all facets of our life; to go with these changes the Darwin's theory of "survival of the fittest", teaches us that only those people will survive who will accept the positive changes and will overcome and cope up the negative ones. To ensure the survival of gen Z in this century with knowledge explosion there is need to incorporate the approach of developing self-directed learners at all the levels of education. Self-directed learning strategies were found to be effective in stimulating thinking and understanding of the topics and to enhance the cognitive skills among the learners (Devi. et al., 2016).

John W. Gardner, a former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, stated in 1963, "The ultimate goal of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education." (as cited in Zimmerman, 1995). There is a clear mandate for self-directed learning. Self-direction is the beginning and the end of lifelong learning; a foundation stone and the keystone of a learning society; a supplement to and a substitute for the formal education system and a vehicle for the mastery of established knowledge (Candy, 1991).

Good teaching involves a perception of students' levels of self-direction and helping them advance to greater self-direction in learning situations (Grow, 1991). In 1995 Bandura states that "The rapid pace of technological change and accelerated growth of knowledge are placing a premium on capability for self-directed learning. Good schooling fosters psychosocial growth that contributes to the quality of life beyond the vocational domain. A major goal of formal education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, self beliefs and self-regulatory capacities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime." (p. 17). Major goal of many lower schools, colleges and universities is to develop lifelong, self-directed learners (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Candy (2003) was of the view that much can be learned from the experiences, interests and priorities of self-directed learners that can be applied to supporting the learning efforts of those engaged in more formal studies. Teachers should adapt their teaching styles to match students' readiness of self direction and to increase students' self-directedness. Problems occur when dependent learners are mismatched with non-directive teachers and when

self-directed learners are mismatched with highly directive teachers (Lam, 2004).

Wang and Cranton (2012) in an article reported that in PISA(Program for International Student Assessment) the students from industrialized nations including newly emerged China and India performed outstandingly than the students of the Western cultures, especially the United States. SDL worked as a driving force for their accomplishments. They further suggested that if the learners ' of western cultures have to catch up the learners' of industrialized nations then SDL must be promoted and implemented at all levels of education. In most of the theories/models, SDL was emphaiszed as the single most popular model that can help learners to master skills for the sake of competency development. The goal of learning is to achieve the "perspective transformation'.

Mohammadi and Araghi (2013) conducted research in Iran and found that half of the learners' SDLR was at an average or below average level, which is likely to be insufficient for conducting successful self-directed language learning (SDLL), whereas, a positive correlation was sought between SDLR and course accomplishment. This study argued for the need for appropriate training to improve learners' SDLR that directly contributes to a successful ESP learning at distance education in Iran.

In nutshell it can be said that self-direction can be learnt and it can be taught. Teachers and teacher educators have an important role to play in assisting students to internalize the skills of self-directed learning and for this they themselves need to understand the concept of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning and technology readiness have a positive influence on learning motivation in blended learning (Geng, Law and Nui, 2019). Regan (2003) emphasized the necessity of examining the factors motivating students towards self-directed learning. Students need specific guidance and feedback to motivate them towards self-directed learning. The first and foremost responsibility of a facilitator of learning is to help individual student to develop the competence of self-directed learning according to his/her ability. To continue learning independently throughout life, one must be self-regulated and self-directed. Many of the career changes require new learning that must be self-initiated and self-directed (Weinstein, 1996).

Findings

In accordance with first objective of the study and on the basis of analysis of the literature reviewed it has been found that control, self-awareness, self-motivation, taking decisions independently, self-regulation and zeal to learn are the crux areas in all the research studies (Long ,1989; Candy,1991; Garrison, 1997) explaining the construct of self-directed learning.

In accordance with second objective of the study and on the basis of analysis of the literature reviewed it has been found that cognitive factors, control factors, affective factors, procedural factors and content factors personal responsibility, readiness to learn, personal control, autonomy, personal

empowerment, and individual freedom in decision making as the antecedents of self-directed learning in educational setting (Guglielmino, 1978; Long, 1989, 1990; Candy, 1991; Merriam, 2001; Mok & Cheng, 2001).

As far as the third objective is concerned and in the light of analysis of the literature reviewed it has been found that moderate positive relationship was detected between self-directed learning skills and lifelong learning tendencies (Aşkin Tekkol and Demirel, 2018) and self-directed learning is regarded as an appropriate and preferred learning process which prepare students for lifelong learning in their professions and also make them stay up-to-date (Kidane, et al, 2020).

Conclusion

Traditional education has the main focus on "how to teach", but important issue to be discussed in the present time is, teaching students "learn how to learn" (Weinstein, 1996). Students of present generation are much more demanding and curious than the previous generations. The reasons might be their early exposure to the technologies, influence of west, changed parenting styles and obvious the great social change. The era of the 21st century brings many changes in the lifestyle. Immense range of new and innovative ways of living takes part in everyday operations. This increases expectations from the people. One of the best ways to be successful is improving skills. Knowledge and skills are necessary to do work, and it will change over time by leading to learning new things. We need to do a little work every day to reach the goal for achieving better skills. SDL is a mandatory skill required in the present century for better learning, enhancement of knowledge and for better life. Having a detailed plan and being aware of the barriers (whatever they will be) from the very beginning is extremely beneficial to every person for being successful. Enhancing existing tendencies to acquire and use self-directed learning skills may be an appropriate technique to generate improvement in adults effectively for their future lifelong learning and leading a successful life.

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