Self-Directed Learning Improves Quality of Life

Noorriati Din, Shireen Haron, Rahmah Mohd Rashid

University Technology MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

yati_edc@yahoo.com

Abstract

The SeDLE (Self-directed Learning Environment) Index is developed to measure the strength and ability of the learning environment to facilitate self-directed learning. This is a conceptual paper to explain the development and validation of the SeDLE index. Evidence showed that a self-directed learning environment exhibits a self-directed learner in promoting one's quality of life. The self-directed environment will support and inhibit the ability to function with less supervision among learners thus viewed as a solution to reduce the problem of spoon feeding in the classrooms.

Keywords: Self-directed, life, quality, interaction

1.0 Introduction

Over the past several years, the approach of self-directed learning has emerged in the teaching and learning settings. The self-directed approach has been credited with improving individual's performance and maintaining motivation to endure more self-autonomy that can cater the problem of spoon feeding in a classroom. In addition, learning environment such as self-directed learning is seemingly able to improve one's life (Shireen Haron, 2004) to define the quality of life in this study. One of the well-known proponents in support of the adult education and self-directed learning is Knowles (1975). He had indicated that the broadest meaning of self-directed learning is a process whereby the individuals are taking the initiative, with or without the assistance of others. Knowles's definition also includes determining student's learning needs and wants to formulate their learning goals. Besides, this study is to identify the human and material resources for learning, choosing and implement appropriate learning strategies as well as evaluating learning outcomes are part of the self-directed learning process. The self-directed approach provides a learning environment that promotes learner's intellectual growth to determine the best way for one's learning. The approach favourably effects learner's cognitive ability and mental health through choice and control for their learning activities. Ideally, self-confidence increased and quality of life improved. Studies in the areas of self-directed learning are gaining popularity for various reasons. Among the reasons are about the growing dissatisfaction with student's attitude in class, the public schooling rigid system, the role of instructors in a classroom, and the rich formal and informal learning materials available online. The problem of spoon feeding is another factor associated with the interest in the self-directed learning issue. After all, this is the "age of information" and self-directed learning can be the solution. Hanaffin et al., (2014) states that the new learning environment designs and frameworks have emerged that are consistent with constructivist-inspired views of learning where learners construct knowledge through experiences with information at finger tips. Therefore, the focus of this study is to develop a self-directed learning index tend to reflex the core self-directed elements that are most relevant to the individual learners for successful learning.

2.0 Literature Review

The researcher's development of Self-Directed Learning Index (SeDLE) came into existence in 2012. The index had won the innovation competition conducted by the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies University Technology MARA Malaysia with the Gold Award. In fact, research on self-directed learning has started way back in 1999 where many initiatives were emphasized to inculcate the self-learning among students to reduce their total dependency on the lecturers or in other words spoon feeding. During the development of this Index, many publications being produced by the co-author. There are more than twenty publications to measure the scores of each component. Amongst the publications are Shireen Haron et. al. (2000), Shireen Haron (2004), Shireen Haron (2009), Shireen Haron and Fauziah Hassan (2009). Further insight conducted on the issue of the self-directed learning environment by Shireen Haron and Rahmah Mohd Rashid (2012),

Noorriati Din and Shireen Haron (2012) and Noorriati Din et. al. (2014). The SeDLE Index consists of four domains and will discuss in the next paragraph below.

2.1 Teaching Environment

The first pertinent component is the teaching environment that consists of three learning processes such as the following:

2.1.1 Effective Instructional Processes

One relevant issue that most instructors face is to establish an optimal self-directed learning environment with an efficient instructional process. As the adults entering a training setting, formal classroom, or self-directed learning activity, it comes with a variety of needs, differences, and expectations. Therefore, such varieties must be met as to accommodate the survival of the self-directed learning environment (Raemdock et al., 2012; Kvan, 2013). The learning management system (LMS) that facilitates self-directed learning must have these characteristics that include the provisions of facilities that help learners to locate resources via the electronic library and its links. Next, the provision of services for collaborative learning such as e-mail, forum, and chat. Then, the framework technology design must be created and developed as simple as possible for learner's easy use. Furthermore, a good guide on the characteristics of support to facilitate self-directed learning that includes the availability of technical support to assist learners. Availability of technical support is to help learners if they confronted with technical difficulties and the orientation training will help the learners to adapt to the web-based learning platform. Finally, the availability of support services such as the electronic library and supports for student learning such as providing study skills programs. With all of the considerations mentioned, the component of effective instructional processes will be more satisfactory and be the relevant part of the self-directed domains.

2.1.2 Instructors Skills and Roles

Instructors must be trained the skills to facilitate self-directed learning in their classrooms (Shireen Haron et. al, 2000; Shireen Haron, 2004). Establish an optimal self-directed learning environment with an effective instructional process is a common challenge in self-directed issues. As mentioned earlier regarding accommodating the needs and wants of adults learners by Raemdock (2012), a higher level of instructor's individual attention is required to attend student's needs and supports by giving direction especially during the transition to self-directed learning. The best way to instruct adults is through an individualized process, to help learners assume more responsibility for their learning. In any case, it means that an effective instructor for adult learners must be responsible for helping them to become more self-sustain, more intellectually curious, and more capable of learning by themselves. Establishing the assistance ultimately refers to the role and skills of facilitators to facilitate self-directed learning. Besides, the lecturers should be competent themselves in online learning (Hiemstra, 2013).

Schmidt et. al. (2011) suggested that students who had tutors with subject matter experts and good tutoring skills tend to engage in more self-directed learning behaviors. Another

study by Egan and Akdere (2004) conducted a survey on educators to identify their key roles, outputs, competencies of Distance Education professionals, rate the importance of these competencies and outputs. The findings showed that educators need to adapt teaching patterns to technology, maintain interaction, engage learners, and collaborate with others in course development. The findings showed that instructors wanted more training on how to foster interaction with the students, design visual aids, and deal with technicians and site coordinators and how to use the technology efficiently and effectively. Additionally, the study also highlighted important factors such as praising students, calling them by name, smiling, and providing individual feedback improve learners learning. Such actions seem appropriate to create confidence and motivation for learners. Another key factor is communication. Communication between students at different sites, the instructor, and the support staff is pertinent. Effective communication and interaction between students and technology need to be imparted to promote interaction among students. Finally, instructors need to develop teamwork with students at various sites to influence the effectiveness of such group.

2.1.3 Effective Learning Materials.
Gruwel et al., (2014) explained a strategic implementation on the aspects of the learning materials and to coordinate on the contents and contexts to fit the need for Self-Regulated Learning and Self-Directed Learning. Gruwell also stresses the need to have self-directed basic skills to establish a self-directed environment. Significant educational support materials will influence the appropriate success of education programs. Therefore, educational supports such as the printed and non-printed materials of textbooks, videotapes, and Internet resources will assist learners' make effective learning reference. The aide of the internet for online communication and interaction via emails, internet phone, and classroom activities are drawn to effective learning materials. However, some programs rely on the usage of pre-packaged and printed materials that are purchased by students from bookstores or publishers prior to starting a course. The learning materials and instruction should be available at any location where there are learners even if there is only one learner. On the other hand, the materials should also be available whether or not there is an instructor at the location and the time the materials are being accessed. The learning materials and instruction should evaluate learner achievement by assessing the learner directly through the attainment of the learning goals. The learning material and instruction should allow learners to learn at their pace, consistent with the concept of adult learners by Knowles mentioned above. From the above discussions, teaching environment can facilitate self-directed learning and need to have several self-directed features so that learners can study by themselves.

2.2 Learning Environment
The Learning Environment consists of three types of learning. They are as follows:

2.2.1 Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning means that both teachers and learners are active participants in the learning process. It is an educational approach that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. The learners can present and defend their ideas, to exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks and be actively engaged. Woods et. al. (2012) study is inconsistent to find learners who gain most from co-operative work are those who give and receive elaborated explanations. Besides, learners are to assist each other for answers and willing to share questions rather than seeking answers from teachers.

2.2.2 Flexible learning

Flexible learning refers to student requirement to adapt the mode of learning that can be conducted anywhere and anytime outside of the classroom. Flexible learning is beneficial to learners as it provides an opportunity for learners to decide on their leaning style and most importantly they can study at their pace.

2.2.3 Communication and Interaction

The literature on the study of education shows that communication and interaction are of ultimate importance in the classroom (Banerjee, 2013; Hiemstra, 2013). Students in general often learn most effectively when they can interact with their peers or other learners. Moore et al., (2011) and Garisson (2003) mentioned in the earlier works of Moore (1989), identified there are three distinct interactions namely Learner-Instructor, Learner-Learner, and Learner-Content. The use of computer-mediated conferencing for student and teacher interaction seems to have produced positive results (Lee et al., 2003). Learner to Learner interaction is a vital element of any learning situation and for successful learning. The Learner-content such as learning objectives, study plan, questions, and examples must be provided and easy to understand with precise instruction. Clearly, the internet made connectivity possible as they are reachable at anytime and anyplace consistent with the concept of flexible learning as discuss earlier. Bialo & Kachala (1996) found that the usage also increased student to teacher interaction towards the lower-performing students.

2.3 Technology

The integration of technology has by far being implemented in educational settings. The current phenomenon of social media opens opportunities for academic purposes. Thus, proper training on the use of the technology for learning purposes plays a major role in whether a course succeeds or fails (Bates, 2005). Liaw et al. (2007) stated that internet facilities can enhance learning. Using the Web, social media, and the internet facilities as a delivery tool is the ability to enhance self-directed learning by pointing to resources and support materials that may be viewed and incorporated directly into a lesson. The availability of the technology can facilitates self-directed learning through the use and provision of e-library, e-mail, forum, and chat. Moreover, learning can be done openly where other students worldwide can join in the discussion. However, it must be done with good faith and integrity (Noorriati Din et al., 2012).

2.4 Administrative Support Staff

Effective administration support such as having self-directed learning skills and providing technical support are crucial when deciding to implement a self-directed learning. Office automation helps the administration to manage the running of the self-directed learning program smoothly as they can provide a service to students who live distance away from the campus.

2.5 Technical Support

Technical and administrative support staffs often play a crucial role in the success of learning program as attention for active learning. Technical support is one of the essential characteristics for self-directed learning as the environment would help students if they faced with technical problems. The orientation to customize learning to web-based environment is necessary as to prepare the learners with the skills to make learning more efficient and effective.

3.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of SeDLE Index tends to provide guidance and direction to facilitate self-directed learning. The components selected for the index is to measures, planning, control and implementation of the learning environment. It is because a well-planned setting of the self-directed learning environment will allow more flexibility in learning and increase students' ability to become more self-directed. Most importantly, it will benefit learners' future learning activities that may contribute an important aspect in their quality of life. The learners become independent and taking their roles at the advantage of self-directed learning development. Therefore, all four domains or components in the SeDLE Index must work together to achieve self-directed environment effectively. Finally, the self-directed learning environment can exhibit a self-directed learner and a contributing factor to enhance one's quality of life.

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