



# SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: TEACHER AND LEARNER

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, the academic institutions in most countries across the globe are striving their best to uplift the quality of education. Teachers and administrators are looking for variety of ways to make learning interesting and fulfilling which could lead to life-long learning. Similarly, various teaching strategies are being employed to enhance the level of understanding and critical thinking of the students. One approach to meet this goal is through encouraging the students to become self-directed learners. Self-directed learning can be considered part of the teaching methodology for a long period of time. However, the effectiveness of self-directed learning approach is underestimated. As the teacher and learner plays a huge role in determining the utilization and effectiveness of Self-directed learning.

A review of literature shows that self-learning in general, are not only convenient for the teachers, but, in fact, more effective than traditional teaching and learning approach. Hence, this literature review aimed to present the historical underpinning of self-directed learning, the teachers' role in employing self-directed learning and the process on becoming a self-directed learners.

**KEYWORDS:** Self-directed Learning, Methodology, Teachers, Learner, Education.

### Historical Foundation of Self-Directed Learning

Looking back to the historical foundation of self-directed learning, many studies have been conducted in relation to self-directed learning, its definition, approaches, utilization and its impact to individual learner since 1960s (Robertson, 2005, p.2). The literary work of Houle (1961), Knowles (1975) and Tough (1978) became the hallmark of self-directed learning.

The conceptualization of self-directed learning emerged when Tough has been exposed to the study of Houle (1961) about learners' motivation. The study of Houle (1961) gave Tough an idea to further study the characteristics of adult learners and on how do they accomplished their learning projects. The results of Tough's study proves that adult is capable of self-planning or self-directed learning (Robertson, 2005, p. 2).

The description of Tough about the learning that takes place in adults would seems to be new in their era. However, most of the European countries have already been practicing the adult learning since 1920s through the research studies of Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, and Woodyard which focused on intelligence capacity and memory capabilities of both younger and older adult groups (Merriam, 2001, p. 3). Similarly, other research studies in the field of psychology have been conducted since 1950s to explore human learning but it fails to separate the different characteristics, aspects and process of learning between children and adult population (Merriam, 2001, p. 4). Through the years and as educational psychology emerged as well, the researches in adult learning have also expanded. The literary work of Knowles in 1985 gave clearer distinctions between children and adult learning. Knowles further described *andragogy as science and art of adult learning* (Robertson, 2005, p. 4).

### Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning

Several studies have mentioned that prior to the literary works of Knowles, the term Andragogy was utilized already in certain European countries. However it is Knowles who truly popularized its usage, critical assumptions and its elements in educational setting (Merriam, 2001, p. 5; Robertson, 2005, p.4). For Knowles, Andragogy is a separate field of learning that is unique and incomparable to child learning (Pedagogy) (Merriam, 2001, p. 5; Robertson, 2005, p.4). The five critical assumptions of Knowles (Merriam, 2001, p.5; Blondy, 2007, p.116) explained the characteristics of adult learners, namely:

1. **Self-concept:** adult learners has the ability to become independent learners
2. **Life Experiences:** adult learners learned from their past life experiences and this life experiences is also been utilized in the learning process.
3. **Readiness to learn:** adult learners has a mature capability to handle the purpose of learning in preparation for their social responsibilities.
4. **Orientation to learning:** adult learners shifts their learning from one subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.
5. **Motivation to learn:** adult learners is motivated to learn due to internal factors.

Among the five critical assumptions of Knowles, Self-learning or self-directed learning became the major topic of research studies and literatures within adult learning (Merriam, 2001, p. 5; Robertson, 2005, p.4; Scott, 2006, p.2; Liang & Wang, 2011, p.209; Silen & Uhlin, 2008, p.1). According to Malcolm Knowles (1975, p.18) as cited by Scott (2006, p2),

In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

In addition, Bhat & Khamat (2007) defined self-directed learning as a type of learning wherein the learner deliberately seek knowledge based on his initiative, autonomy and will to learn with the use of various instructional methods that is not confined in traditional learning environment.

Ramnarayan and Hande (2005) identified the following important reasons for employing self-directed learning in adult education.

1. *There is convincing evidence that people, who take the initiative in learning, learn more things and learn better than people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught.*
2. *Self-directed learning is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development; an essential aspect of maturing is developing the ability to take increasing responsibility of our own lives to become increasingly self-directed.*
3. *Many of the new developments in education put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take a good deal of initiative in their own learning.*

### Characteristics of a Self-Directed Learner

Majority of the literatures described the concept of self-directed learning in relation to the personal characteristics or "behavioral activities" of the adult learners (Long, 2005, p.1; Canipe & Fogerson, 2006, p.34; Bhat, Rajashekar, & Kamath, 2007; Liang & Wang, 2011, p.211).

Similarly, other studies (Stockdale, 2003, p. 1 as cited by Canipe and Fogerson, 2006, p.34; Long, 2005; Blondy, 2008; p.118) pointed out the self-directed learning is a behavioral process that requires maturity and responsible learning which the adult learner is viewed as the *change agent* of his or her on learning.

Moreover, large numbers of literatures commonly used the term "will" (Liang & Wang, 2011, p.211), "initiative" (Knowles, 1975, p.18), "autonomy" (Boud, 1981 as cited by Scott, 2006 p.10) and "personal responsibility" (Blondy, 2007, p.118) in describing the characteristics of a self-directed adult learner. Those mentioned personal traits should be embodied by the adult learner to become a self-directed learner.

Opposing to the idea presented by (Long, 2005, p.1; Canipe & Fogerson, 2006, p.34; Bhat, Rajashekar, & Kamath, 2007; Liang & Wang, 2011, p.211) is the study of Robertson (2005, p.16), he emphasized that the characteristic of adult learner is difficult to quantify as each adult person in various stages of adulthood has his/her own unique characteristics and reasons in becoming a self-directed learner.

Aside from personal attributes, Liang and Wang (2011, p.210) remarked the literary work of Knowles (1975), "that the ability of self-directed learning is the basic ability that exists in human beings". Liang and Wang (2011, p.210) further expand the concept of ability into self-directed learning ability wherein the learner are expected to *control the learning situation and decide which learning goal to achieve and which methods will be utilized to achieve those learning goals (Self-management)* and the ability to determine the progress of his/her learning (*Self-monitoring*). In congruence to the study of Garisson (1997) and Candy (1991) that a self-directed learner should possess *Self-management* which is concerned with control issues related to enactment of learning goals, control over learning materials, resources and support while *self-monitoring* address cognitive (reflection on learning) and metacognitive (enriching the learning process) responsibility processes (Garisson, 1997, p.24).

However, adults are expected to have various roles in the society, hence aside from personal traits there are other factors that should be considered. One of this is based on motivating factor. Adult learner in college years may become motivated to become self-directed learner to finish the degree whereas older adults may be motivated to become self-directed for leisure purpose (Robertson, 2012). Motivation is a driving force that attracts the adult learner to be in charge of their learning activities. Moreover, when an adult is motivated it will establish commitment to act and initiate learning to achieve particular goal (Liang & Wang, 2011, p.211).

Another factor that can be considered is related to *choice* which is emphasized by Brockett (2006, p. 27) he mentioned that *a learner must have abilities and opportunities to make decision so he/she can produce self-directed learning*. Similar idea was also presented by Hiemstra (2011, p.48) which he emphasized that the decision-making of an adult to become a self-directed learner depends on his/her personal or academic goal.

Whereas Stockdale and Brockett (2011, p. 163) concluded that *self-direction in learning is viewed both as a behavior seen in instructional method processes (self-directed learning) and a personality characteristic of the individual learner (learner self-direction)*. Both components are embedded within a personal responsibility framework and operating within the learner's social environment contributes to the outcome of self-direction in learning.

### Becoming a Self-Directed Learner

*Learning to learn is crucial* (Ramnarayan & Hande, 2005) and *to become self-directed learners, students must learn to assess the demands of the task, evaluate their own knowledge and skills, plan their approach, monitor their progress, and adjust their strategies as needed.*" (Ambrose et al, 2010: 191). Likewise to the principles of Ambrose et al (2010, p. 191) Long (2005, p.4) mentioned on his work that *to become a successful self-directed learner, the learner must develop self-awareness* wherein he/she will have the ability to determine his/her own learning process, strengths and weaknesses.

Whereas, Ramnarayan & Hande (2005) mentioned on their study that *Self-direction can be learned and can be taught*. Similarly, Liang and Wang (2011, p.211) emphasized the role of the educators in transforming the adult learner to become self-directed is through guidance and support. Likewise, Ramnarayan & Hande (2005) stressed that the initial role of the educator is to facilitate learning through interactions and employing various teaching and learning strategies. Moreover, Hiemstra (2011, p.51) postulated *six instructional roles for promoting personal responsibility among adult learners*:

1. **Content resource:** *Sharing expertise and knowledge with learners through written material, web pages, presentations, face to face or online discussions, and some one-on-one advising, conversations, counseling, and coaching* (Posner, 2009 as cited by Hiemstra, 2011).
2. **Resource locator:** *Locating and sharing various learning resources to meet needs identified and emerging during learning experience. These can be written materials, Internet resources, and facilitating people-oriented experiences such as agency audits or visits, mini-internships, and talking with topic specialists.*
3. **Interest stimulator:** *Arranging for and employing, face to face or online, various resources and learning experiences designed to maintain learner interest such as gaming devices, small group discussions, online asynchronous forums, guest presenters, and humorous PPT presentations.*
4. **Positive attitude generator:** *helping learners via constructive feedback, personal encouragement, positive reinforcement, and extensive critique of written material.*

5. **Creativity and critical thinking stimulator:** *Stimulating a learner's creative and critical thinking skills through discussions (face-to-face or online), face-to-face or electronic study groups, journal writing, interactive reading logs, role playing, and simulation of real-life experiences. Additional means include helping learners develop web pages, blogs, and wikis as a means of sharing what they have developed.*

6. **Evaluation stimulator:** *evaluating learner progress and stimulating self-evaluation by learners. The learning contract provides opportunities for learners to think about how they can use an instructor, colleagues, and others to enhance personal evaluation of their learning efforts.*

Further, Thorton (2010, p.160) highlighted that instructions, methodologies and strategies of the educators can induce self-directed learning to learner which entails more commitment and time from the educators. Lastly, according to Gibbons (2003, p. 24), "The teacher shifts from recitation to provocation, from telling to asking, and from instruction to guidance, teaching students to think and find out for themselves."

### Conclusion:

Self-directed learning is a continuous process and still evolving through time due to modernization and technology. To become a self-directed learner it entails personal attributes, cognitive skills and lifelong learning goals. Everyone is capable of becoming a self-directed learner however, when it comes to formal education, the educators has a crucial role to play. Educators must find ways to incorporate self-directed learning strategies in the course without compromising the expected learning outcome and in the process helping the learner to develop self-directed learning skills. Now, that technologies offer wide variety of self-directed learning strategies educators should be mindful and be careful on selection of appropriate self-directed approaches having in mind that though it is considered having autonomy in learning, educators should always be available to guide and support the learners throughout the learning process.

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