Chapter 4

Analysis and Interpretation

By 2020, all learning – from elementary school through post-graduate education – will be based on the principles of self-directed learning. Classrooms will be used only for highly technical didactic instruction. Most facilities will be workrooms where materials and other resources are produced for self-directed learning.

- Malcom Knowles\(^1\)

Until recently, learning used to take place only formally. However, with the increased importance of education, technology and information it is no more advisable or possible to be content with all that is provided formally. One needs to sharpen himself/herself with those skills that are demanded as essential for a successful career. Alternatively, there is need for a variety of sets of skills to support the major skills already acquired. Whatever is taught today as a part of curriculum is not at all sufficient and a learner has to upgrade himself/herself continuously, which is not always possible in formal setting. All these call for the awareness of self directed learning and self-assessment. The initiative for this must come from the learner himself/herself if s/he were to be fair in making an assessment of his/her strengths and weaknesses. However, SWOT Analysis is not always possible in people with narcissistic tendencies.
The need for developing an awareness about self-directed learning and self-assessment as attractive alternative modes of learning and evaluation respectively must become a felt need. This need led people towards self-directed learning much required, especially, in case of the international language of communication, English. With the increased importance attached to English language, more and more people are turning towards self-directed learning due to a variety of reasons and are enabled to achieve encouraging results. Needless to say that this number will increase as time passes. In simple terms, self-directed learning springs out of a self-motivated desire of a learner to pursue his/her choice of knowledge that begins with a conscious or cognitive need to know and the same can also been described as a desire, a curiosity, an interest, a concern, a deficit, or even a wish. Each person manifests his/her inner "need to know" by choosing activities that satisfy, gratify, or pacify his/her needs.

Self-directed learning (SDL) is a method of instruction that is needed to be used increasingly in tertiary institutions. SDL can be defined in terms of the amount of responsibility the learner accepts for his/her own learning. The self-directed learners take control and exercise their freedom to learn what they view as important for themselves. The degree of control, the learner is willing to exercise over his/her own learning will depend on his/her attitude, abilities
and personality characteristics. Readiness for SDL exists along a continuum and is present in all individuals to some extent. There is adequate support for this available in literature on the subject which underscores the point that matching teaching delivery with SDL readiness offers the best opportunity for learning (e.g. Guglielmino\textsuperscript{2} 1977, Wiley\textsuperscript{3} 1983, O’Kell\textsuperscript{4} 1988, Grow\textsuperscript{5} 1991).

The research, from the planning stage itself is pregnant with very relevant and significant aims and objectives among which the first one was to compare and contrast self directed learning and self-assessment with the methods of learning and assessment in traditional education. In this line, the review of literature done highlights the characteristics of a self-directed learner, which are many and varied. The following, for example, summarizes the general aspects that appear in the literature (Knowles\textsuperscript{6}, 1975; Brockett & Hiemstra\textsuperscript{7}, 1991; Candy\textsuperscript{8}, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella\textsuperscript{9}, 1991; Guglielmino & Guglielmino\textsuperscript{10}, 1991; Gibbons\textsuperscript{11}, 2002):

a) **Desire for learning**: For the purpose of knowledge acquisition, self-directed learners’ motivations for learning are extremely strong.
b) **Independence**: Self-directed learners are fully responsible people who can independently analyze, plan, execute, and evaluate their own learning activities.

c) **Self-management**: Self-directed learners can identify what they need during the learning process, set individualized learning goals, control their own time and effort in learning, and arrange feedbacks for their work.

d) **Problem-solving**: In order to achieve the best learning outcomes, self-directed learners make use of existing learning resources and feasible learning strategies to overcome the difficulties which occur in the learning process.

The four characteristics enumerated above seem to construct a concept, which separates self-directed learners from others because self-directed learners control their own learning autonomously. Despite the autonomous nature of self-directed learners, they, however, need to interact with peers and fellow learners in order to exchange valuable information and validate their self-assessment profiles and grades.

It is a universal fact that formal education and schooling remain highly valued in most societies, and many educators, employers, policy-makers, and average citizens find it difficult to place high value on what is learned on his/her own
or outside the formal system. However, as discussed in the review of literature, non-traditional programs, distance education, and self-directed learning efforts can meet many challenges related to one’s keeping up with current or constantly changing knowledge. Self-directed learning researchers have challenged the assumption that adult learning can take place only in the presence of accredited teachers. Several researchers also have demonstrated that giving some learning responsibility back to learners in many instances is more beneficial than other approaches. For example, in the workplace, employees with busy schedules can learn necessary skills on their own at their own convenience through self-study. Some technical staff in organizations who must constantly upgrade their knowledge can access new information through an individualized resource center.

Insofar as the role of tutors and technology in self-directed learning is concerned, there is no room for doubt that one of the most important tasks of the teacher is to raise student awareness of their roles in learning. To get this done they should be convinced on one thing, i.e. they can.

Learner participation in decision-making is another fundamental aspect of the SDL approach. Students should be involved in decisions concerning what is to
be learned, when and how it should be learned, and how it should be evaluated. The rationale behind this is obvious. An autonomous learner would know why s/he is learning what s/he has chosen to, how this fits in with the current demands on the job-market. A successful person is one who knows how to remain one step ahead of his/her competitors in this consumer-driven world. In addition, every proponent of SDL emphasizes the importance of allowing learners to pursue their own interests so that learning becomes more meaningful.

Moreover, teachers who want to encourage SDL need to free themselves from a preoccupation with tracking and correcting errors. They need to advocate a greater tolerance of uncertainty and encourage risk-taking, for one would never know what works unless one tries it out. Good teachers capitalize on learners' strong points instead of focusing on weaknesses, as it is more beneficial for learners to achieve a few objectives of importance to them than it is to fulfill all the objectives that are important to the teacher.

It makes sense to allow learners should be allowed to explore ideas through peer discussions, even without fully intact answers. This process can yield new and valuable insights. Corno (1992) suggests allowing learners to pursue
personal interests without the threat of formal evaluation. Even if they make mistakes while doing so, the activities would sustain their interest, transcend frustration, and eventually break barriers to achievement.

To establish the habit of self-monitoring, teachers need to encourage learners to reflect on what they did and to revise attempted work. Keeping journals is one way of maintaining a record of the learning process.

For educational institutions and employers engaged in providing self-directed learning experiences, Brockett & Hiemstra\textsuperscript{13} (1985) recommend the following:

a. Have the faculty meet regularly with panels of experts who can suggest curricula and evaluation criteria

b. Conduct research on current trends as well as future needs and learners' interests

c. Obtain the necessary tools to assess learners' current performance and to evaluate their expected performance

d. Provide opportunities for self-directed learners to reflect on what they are learning
e. Recognize and reward learners when they have met their learning objectives

f. Promote learning networks, study circles, and learning exchanges

g. Provide staff training on self-directed learning and broaden the opportunities for its implementation

Moving to the role of technology in self-directed learning we find that recorded human history is a witness to the fact that technology has brought paradigmatic shifts in education by empowering it. Until recently, it was believed that successful communication between a teacher and a student is a vital element for successful process of learning. However, this perception has given way and we now credit the technological media and self-directed learning for all this.

Online learning supports the self-directed learner in pursuing individualized, self-paced learning activities. The learner, working on a computer at a convenient time and pace, is able to search and utilize the vast resources of the Internet research nearly on any topic imaginable. However, that comes with a rider. Not everything available on the Internet is reliable and a learner has to master the art of patience and develop skills that would enable him/her to restrict searches in a way as to get the right mind of information and data. The
test of doing this has been discussed in Chapter 3 related to research design.

Students can visit libraries, museums and various institutes world-wide, talk to professionals, access recent research, and read newspapers and peer reviewed online scholarly journals. Students can write collaboratively with peers and even publish written and multimedia products on web pages.

Self-Assessment

Self-Assessment Questionnaire

1. http://as01.ucis.dal.ca/hrd/hrd_2689.html
3. http://www.cambridge-efl.g.uk/support/dlads/index.htm

Self-Assessment Resources


Self-Directed Learning

Techniques, Tools and Resources for the Self-Directed Learner

Unleashing the Power of Self-Directed Learning


Developing Self-Directed Learners


Writing Skills

17. http://www.how-to-com/Index%20Cards%20Research%20Papers.htm

Journals of Interactive Online Learning


Vocabulary


Listening: Real Audio

27. http://www.real.com

The BBC


Learning Oral English Online


Cyber ESL Listening Lab

Reading


Writing: On-Line writing Laboratory

33. http://owl.english.purdue.edu

Speaking: Learn Oral English online

34. http://lang.uiuc.edu/r-li5lbook

IELTS


Discussion lists: Directory of discussion lists


Deja News

Grammar ideas at DEN (Digital Educational Network)


Developing Language Skills: Internet Grammar of English


Hiway

40. http://www.hiway.co.uk/ei

Dave's Esl Café (Self-study quizzes for ESL students & Randall's ESL Cyber Café Listening Lab)

42. freeENGLISH.com
43. EnglishZone.com

English Page

44. English Practice.com

Planet English

45. EnglishLearner.com
With ever-accelerating speed of change in both knowledge and technology, it is clear that adults have a choice: Either continue to learn throughout lives, or allow skills and knowledge to quickly slide into obsolescence. These days, life does not stand still and society is developing scientifically and technically. Anyone who does not engage in self-education and self-assessment, whether or voluntarily, lags behind. In this way, the first hypotheses – *self-direction and self-assessment in learning is a way of life that has attracted attention of researchers in recent times* – stands true.

One of the hypotheses related self-directed learning and self-assessment with survival and stated that both the things exist to some degree in every person and learning situation. This also stands true, as in many respects, future learners will need to become very self-directed throughout their lives just to cope with the enormity of information available to them. A learner needs to know himself thoroughly well. Self-directed learning is the process of having an educational experience of equal qualitative value for the learners to best suit their needs outside the classroom. Self-directed has various forms. Some of them are distance education, distance learning, online learning, e-learning, web-based learning, home study courses, and correspondence courses. Self-directed learning makes learning achievable from the comfort of one’s home or an office or library. It is a perfect way to study for career with jobs,
children, disabilities, or other reasons that make it difficult to attend a campus or classroom. All types of additional qualifications can be gained through this. Actually, the 'why' of self-directed learning is survival – our own survival as an individual, and also the survival of the human race. Clearly, educationists are not talking here about something that would be nice or desirable; neither are they talking about some new educational fad.

Self-directed and self-assessment are basic human competencies - the ability to learn and evaluate on one's own – that has suddenly become a prerequisite for living in this new world, is the next hypotheses which also stands true. We buy a book and think about the writer's viewpoint. We view a talk show on a news channel and mull over the things discussed before arriving at a conclusion. We take some time at the end of the day to think about our day and what we learned from it. These are all informal forms of self-directed learning and almost everyone from a toddler to an elderly person, one way or the other, has learnt through self-direction. Besides, self-directed learning and self-assessment are always the best way to learn for certain people, especially to the students at tertiary level and people at workplaces. For, the world of academics has come to recognize learner-centredness.
Over and over it is stated that in the world of knowledge today there is a new thing to learn practically every day and obviously with many limitations and restrictions the syllabi cannot cover the topics required to be taught as well as learnt. Hence self-directed learning is the only solution to have an extra edge over others in the formal learning as well as for survival after stepping out of the portals of an institute. Likewise, another important skill for today's rapidly changing workforce is in self-reflection. The highly motivated, self-directed learner with skills in self-reflection can approach the workplace as a continual classroom from which to learn.

Self-Directed Learning is ideal for the workplace as it holds numerous advantages over traditional forms of classroom instruction for employees in the workplace, whether they are leaders, managers, or individual contributors. Bouchard explains,

Over the years, it has become increasingly clear that traditional approaches to program design and delivery in the workplace and in associative organizations present some important weaknesses. Problem areas include: coping with the short life span of useful knowledge; passing down acquired competencies to succeeding cohorts;
accommodating the demands of productivity while providing for a continuity of learning; [and] enabling learners to pursue activities that correspond to their learning styles and needs.

**Self-directed learning programs at workplace**

1. Are more effective in development because learning accommodates employees’ learning styles and objectives
2. Save substantial training costs because learners learn to help themselves and each other with practical and timely materials
3. Achieve increased employee effectiveness in their jobs as they learn to learn from their own work experiences and actually apply their learning in their places of work

One of the myths that people carry about self-directed learning and self-assessment is that all learning will take place in isolation from others. However, this belief does not have any substance in it. Peer group, study group, internship, the role of teacher as facilitators in terms of ongoing interaction, securing of resources, helping evaluate outcome and promoting thinking play a crucial role. Self-directed learning and self-assessment also involve various activities and resources, such as self-guided reading,
participation in study groups, internships, and reflective writing activities and one’s own assessment of one’s performance.

**Self-assessment**

There are many varieties of assessment tools, easy measuring a particular facet of a person, like his/her knowledge, interests, skills, personality, and values. Learner diary is one such example. A learner diary is a reflective, first-hand account by a learner of his/her language learning experiences, and his/her reflections and reactions to the process. This can be useful tool because students can complete a series of prompts such as the following using a guided reflective process:

1. This week I studied ............................
2. This week I learned .............................
3. This week I used my English in these places ..........................
4. This week I spoke English with these people ..........................
5. This week I made these mistakes .............................
6. My difficulties are ...............................
7. I would like to know .............................
8. I would like help with ...........................
9. My learning and practicing plans for next week are .....................
At the end of each week/month, students would complete this reflection sheet and submit it to the teacher as an email attachment preferably. The teacher would comment on it and return it to them. Over the course of a semester, the test administrators as well as the learners would notice what needs to be changed on their side and would accordingly modify their focus. Thus, in addition to facilitating the growth of learners’ capacity for autonomy and independence, diaries can be very illuminating for both the teacher and student.

There are many ways that self-directed learning strategies can be incorporated in the classroom. The following are some ideas to get started.

1. Involve students in planning. You may wish to have students develop questions for a lesson or assist you in identifying topics that need to be included in a specific lesson.
2. Allow students to make choices regarding the way in which they demonstrate learning.
3. Schedule time for students to select activities that they wish to do.
4. Present problem situations and let students discuss how they would go about solving the problem and where they would obtain information.
5. Have students describe how they learnt specific skills.
6. Discuss the importance of self-directed learning in all facets of life, including at the institution, in the workplace, and at home.

7. Teach goal-setting skills and have students use learning contracts and/or develop task lists.

**Signposts on the Path to self-directed learning and Self-Assessment**

In guiding oneself or others through the self-directed learning process, the learning points can be used as signposts, or benchmarks. These signposts on the path to self-direct learning and self-assessment are:

1. Has the person engaged in his/her passion and dreams? Can he/she describe the person he/she wants to be, the life and work he/she wants to have in the future? Can he/she describe his/her Ideal Self?
2. Does the person know himself/herself? Does he/she have a sense of his/her Real Self / Self-work?
3. Can the person articulate both his/her strengths (those aspects he/she wants to preserve) and gaps or discrepancies between his/her Real and Ideal Selves (those aspects he/she wants to overcome or change)?
4. Can the person manage both Strengths and Gaps- not letting one become the preoccupation?
5. Does the person have his/her own personal learning agenda? Is it really his/her own? Can the elements of the plan fit into the structure of his/her life and work? Do the actions fit with his/her learning style and flexibility?

6. Is the person experimenting and practising new habits and actions? Is the person using his/her learning plan to learn more from his/her experiences?

7. Has the person found settings in which to experiment and practice in which he/she feels psychologically safe?

8. Is the person developing and utilizing his/her relationships as part of his/her learning process? Does he/she have coaches, mentors, friends, and others with whom he/she can discuss progress on his/her learning agenda? Does he/she have relationships with whom he/she can explore his/her new behavior, habits, new Ideal Self, new Real Self, new strengths and gaps as the process unfolds?

Having listed these signposts, it would not be wrong to say that our future may not be entirely within our control, but most of what we become is within our power to create. Hopefully, the self-directed learning process which also implies self-assessment can provide a roadmap and guidance on how to increase the effectiveness of learning efforts. However, to have the effective
self-directed learning and self-assessment, the learner is expected to have certain attributes which are discussed below:

**Attributes of Self-directed learning as well as a Learner**

Developing the tendency and capacity to set goals, along with the necessary persistence and the development of self confidence, are the greatest contributors to achievement in both the institution and life. In the process of self-directed learning and self-assessment, many factors play a vital role. They are listed below:

1. **Supportive climate**

This means environment conducive for learning. The environment includes physical, psychological as well as sociological climate that shows that the learner is accepted, respected and supported. The environment in which there exists a spirit of support between teachers and students and the same should assist a learner in diagnosing needs for learning as well as the present level of competence and of minimizing the gap between the desired level of competence and the present level.
2. Active involvement of the learner in planning

On the basis of self diagnosis, the learner should be made competent enough to turn the needs into specific learning objectives, changing and conducting learning experiences to achieve these objectives, and evaluating the extent to which they have been achieved.

3. Motivation

Motivation in language-learning plays a vital role. It is motivation that produces effective second-language communicators by planting in them the seeds of self-confidence. Motivation is vital in language learning. It makes language learners positive about their own learning. It also creates the drive in them to acquire the targeted language, enjoy the learning process, and experience real communication. Moreover, experience of success and satisfaction has a strong connection with motivation. By realizing their
improvement and achievement, students always experience a high with the feeling of success. In order for language students to become satisfied with a lesson, a stress-free classroom is a pre-requisite. We need to develop an integrated-tasks lesson. A certain bond of trust between a teacher and the students is essential so that much communication in a targeted language is developed.

4. Self-Awareness

A successful self-directed learner has the ability to be aware of "self." This attribute is closely related to some of the executive processes identified with metacognition. It enables individuals to be aware of their learning processes, of their weaknesses and strengths, to know if they can muster additional powers of concentration, to know of their ability to use a different approach, to know how and what is distracting in their environment, to know the importance of a given learning activity, to know when they need assistance, and to have a realistic perception of their ability to achieve their learning goal.

5. Goal Setting Skills

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence and the quality of performance. Effective goals are
very specific and measurable. Goals stated in the form of "I want to be the best that I can be!" or "I want to improve my performance!" are vague and thus difficult to measure. These may be positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether they have been reached. It is worthwhile to set measurable goals. Measurable goals are those that establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks for them to be realistic. A learner should set long-v/s short-term goals. Both long- and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

Given below is a list of questions that a self-directed learner needs to answer and answer honestly. The answers to these success discovery questions will be useful in clarifying his/her core foundation. This foundation will serve as a navigational tool to help him/her to make the decisions and choices that will move him/her towards the vision and elevate him/her to achieve his/her goals. S/he simply needs to write them down and place them where s/he can see them everyday.
1. Clarify your Vision

2. What is your primary aim?

3. Where do you want to see yourself in 10 to 20 years?

4. List your personal, professional, and financial goals and objectives.
   a. 1 year
   b. 3 years

5. Clarify your business/career needs today.

6. Identify what obstacles, challenges or limitations may sabotage your efforts.

7. Describe your professional role/position today in detail.

8. Identify your expectations of yourself over the next 8 to 12 months.

9. Based on the answers to the discovery questions above, what three action steps do you need to take today to move you closer to your goals?

10. What three action steps do you need to take this week? This month?

Unfortunately many individuals have not learnt how to determine what is important and then how to select from alternative possibilities – or to even imagine possibilities that have not been given to them by those in authority. These individuals have become accustomed to having questions and problems identified for them rather than developing the cognitive ability to engage in problem posing, problem identification, and problem-solving. Consequently,
they also may have limited observational skills that inhibit their ability to
determine what is important in their learning environment. Therefore, some
effort is often required to develop these skills before a person becomes a
successful self-directed learner. Thus, when working with people with little
experience in self-directed learning, we need to pay careful attention to helping
them imagine possible outcomes of results of their learning, and then
encouraging them to know how and why to choose from a multiplicity
desirable goals.

6. Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the most significant in language-learning. It provides
learners with the motivation and energy to become positive about their own
learning. It also creates them the drive in to acquire the targeted language,
enjoy the learning process, and experience real communication.

At the heart of all, learning is a person’s belief in his/her ability to
accomplish the task (Atsuta\textsuperscript{14}, 2003).
In general, successful language learners appear to have higher self-esteem than those who are unsuccessful” (Richard-Amato, 2003). Lack of belief in one’s ability hinders him/her from achieving that task — pursuing a targeted language accomplishment. Moreover, it is widely believed that once students gain self-confidence, it progressively expands, in conjunction with experiencing success and satisfaction as well as good relationships.

According to http://www.mindtools.com/selfconf.html, student confidence can affect learning: students who have a high level of self-confidence perform better academically. Students who believe they are competent learners thrive under challenging conditions and see it as a way to become better students. Having self-confidence allows students to share ideas with their peers more easily than those who lack confidence.

Students who lack self-confidence might benefit from workshops in their school, library, Internet, or any place that offers a chance for them to improve their self image, and as a result, boost their learning.
7. Basic Competence as per the requirement

It is desirable to have some minimal level of aptitude or competence on the part of a self-directed learner. Key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each are fundamental for a learner in the related area. If a learner desires to learn English language, he should have or acquire some knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main type of verbal interaction and registers of language. Essential skills for communication in foreign language consist of the ability to understand spoken messages, to read and to produce text appropriate to the individual’s need. For example, an individual is likely to be a more successful self-directed learner with some pre-existing awareness of fundamental vocabulary, concepts and structure of the information. Hence, someone who knows basic arithmetic may be able to be self-directing in learning Maths than English. Or someone who knows his/her own language may learn another language based on his/her knowledge of the first language.

Decision Making Skills

This skill category might be given a number of labels to connote "thinking" ability. Some might refer to it as being ‘logical in thought’. Others might prefer ‘analytical’ and yet others might choose ‘critical’. Regardless of the label, the self-directed learner must develop the ability to identify, prioritize,
select, validate, evaluate, and interpret information obtained through the processing skills. Information is not equal; some of it is more useful than some other for given purposes. Learners who are unable to establish some kind of observation protocol based on learning goals are unlikely to be self-directed learners. A successful self-directed learner develops the ability to determine and evaluate the sources of information as well as the reliability, validity, and meaning of information (including theories and other explanations).

8. Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness is the ability to find a way to achieve the goal or to set one. This is especially true when the goal is difficult to achieve and when little or no direction is given. Resourcefulness is the ability to think creatively, to generate ideas, and to identify alternatives. Resourcefulness is also imagination, the ability to visualize how something could be achieved when nothing but a vision is all we have. Resourcefulness demands self-discipline, optimism, competitiveness and initiative.

To sum, self-directed people are resourceful. They tend to engage in cause-and-effect thinking, spend energy on tasks, set challenging goals, persevere in the face of barriers and occasional failures and accurately forecast future performances. They proactively locate resources when perplexed. Seeking
constant improvement, they are flexible in their perspectives and are optimistic and confident with self-knowledge. They are in continuous learning mode. Their confidence, in combination with their inquisitiveness, allows them to search constantly for new and better ways. People with this disposition always strive for improvement, always grow, always learn, always modify and improve themselves. They seize problems, situations, tensions, conflicts and circumstances as valuable opportunities to learn. After many years of reflection about learning, an eminent psychologist, Carl Rogers\(^6\) (1961), founder of self-directed therapy, asserted that

Anything that can be taught to another is relatively inconsequential, and has little or no significant influence on behavior. The only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered and self-appropriated learning.

**End Notes:**


