



Fostering Self-Directed Learning in Higher Education: The Efficacy of Guided Learning Approach among First-Year University Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the efficacy of the guided learning approach in promoting self-directedness among first-year, first-semester university students in Malaysia. Based on a sample of 37 participants, this study employs the SECI (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization) Model as a theoretical framework to examine the transfer of knowledge between the lecturer and students, as well as among students. Using an SDL (Self-Directed Learning) Questionnaire, the study assesses the students' level of self-directed learning in the early stages of the semester and then again following the implementation of the guided learning approach throughout the remainder of the semester. The results of this study reveal that the guided learning approach has a substantial positive impact on students' self-directedness, with 94.59% of the participants exhibiting an increase in their SDL level by the end of the semester. These findings reinforce the notion that a guided learning approach is crucial in fostering self-directedness among first-year, first-semester university students in Malaysia and, more broadly, highlight the importance of fostering self-directed learning in higher education.

Keywords: guided learning, self-directed learning, student-centred learning, SECI model

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1 INTRODUCTION

Self-directed learning (SDL) is a process where individuals take the initiative to identify their learning needs, set learning goals, find resources, choose learning strategies, and evaluate their learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). In contrast to the teacher-centred approach, university students are expected to have the skills necessary for SDL, allowing them to study independently and take responsibility for their learning. However, many studies, including those conducted in Malaysia, have discovered that first-year university students tend to learn in a teacher-centred manner (Du Toit-Brits, 2019; Ismail, 2017; Ming & Alias, 2007; Wong, 2004). The phenomenon continues to persist even when self-directed learning is expected to be utilised in higher education. Based on personal observations of teaching first-year, first-semester students in Malaysia, many students still use a passive learning style, waiting for the lecturer to provide learning content rather than actively seeking knowledge.

In the era of IR4.0, with the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and augmented reality, knowledge is accessible "at the fingertip", and access to learning resources is much easier than ever before. However, learning depends on the learners' will and effort and whether they have sufficient learning skills that can equip them to be more self-directed and independent in their learning. With all its limitations, the positive side of the Covid-19 pandemic has conditioned the practice of self-directed learning, where university students had to adapt to become more independent when circumstances do not allow face-to-face learning. During the pandemic, they have had to equip themselves with clear learning goals to empower their self-directed learning attitudes and engage in online learning (Sun et al., 2022).

Implementing various approaches and designs in learning activities allows the students to enhance self-directed learning. A study conducted by Fong, Gonzales, Hill-Troglin Cox, and Shinn (2023) found that there is a positive association between academic help-seeking behaviour (i.e., self-reported, instrumental help-seeking, formal help-seeking) and academic performance which shows the importance of guided learning empowerment that rooted in the positive interactions between the students and the learning facilitator. Collaborative learning activities which involve peer interactions and discussions in small groups also can promote the development of the primary skills of self-directed learning, which are essential for students' survival at the tertiary level. Such interactions allow the students to empower their learning capacity, ask questions, identify relevant resources or tools, and make connections between the courses they study (Warburton & Volet, 2013).

Guglielmino (1977) argued that the growth of self-directed learning is not fixed to one stage, but it is a continuum that requires the engagement of the processes and the ways of teaching and learning delivery. On top of that, the influence of a learner's characteristics (attitudes, values, abilities) is a primary indicator of the successful self-directed learning process. Possession of grit character among university students is associated with academic performance, autonomous learning, self-regulation, and psychological well-being (Ramos Salazar & Meador, 2023). Although self-directed learning aims to develop independent learners, we cannot disregard that students still need assistance (lecturer's role as facilitator) to improve their self-management skills