SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING STRATEGIES OF UNIMAS UNDERGRADUATES

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The project entitled 'Self-Directed Learning Strategies of Unimas Undergraduates' was prepared by Annie Ting Liu Hwa and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all necessary amendments of the project for acceptance:

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ABSTRACT

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This paper aimed to investigate the relationship between students' internal factors and students' preference strategies of self-directed learning among Unimas undergraduates. 635 students were selected from the eight faculties in Unimas to take part in this research study. Data for this study were collected through the administration of questionnaire to the respondents. The result showed that Unimas students preferred to use instructional styles to develop their self-directed learning ability. There was a significant correlation between the facilitation strategies with students' internal factors. Motivation and self-directed learning readiness were the dominant factors that affect students' degree of self-directed learning. Besides, there were gender and faculties difference in terms of the deployment of self-directed learning strategies. Students from different faculties used quite similar self-directed learning strategies, but they were differed in terms of the ranking of its importance. Female students used more self-directed learning strategies than the male students did. This study implied that instructors played a crucial role to boost up students internal factors (motivation, self-directed learning readiness and self-concept) in order to develop students' self-directed learning attitude to success academically in their learning. However, this study also implied that the institutions and faculties failed to provide sufficient learning supports to the students to enhance their learning ability. Some future recommendations were also proposed in this research study.

ABSTRAK

STRATEGI-STRATEGI 'SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING' BAGI MAHASISWA-MAHASISWA UNIMAS

Annie Ting Liu Hwa

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat hubungan antara faktor-faktor dalaman dan keutamaan strategi-strategi 'self-directed learning' di kalangan mahasiswa-mahasiswa Unimas. Seramai 635 orang pelajar telah dipilih dari lapan fakulti di Unimas untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian penyelidikan ini. Soal selidik telah diberikan kepada responden-responden untuk mengutip data bagi kajian ini. Keputusan-keptusan bagi kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa ramai pelajar Unimas mengutamakan cara-cara atau stail yang digunakkan oleh pendidik-pendidik (instructional styles) sebagai strategi yang penting untuk membangunkan kemahiran mengarah pembelajaran sendiri. Terdapat korelasi yang signifikan antara strategi-strategi 'self-directed learning' dengan faktor-faktor dalaman bagi pelajar-pelajar. Motivasi dan kesediaan untuk mengarah pelajaran sendiri merupakan faktor-faktor dalaman paling penting yang mempengaruhi kemahiran 'self-directed learning' dalam proses pembelajaran. Selain itu, keptusan kajian ini melaporkan perbezaan antara fakulti and jantina dalam pengunaan strategi 'self-directed learning'. Ia juga menyatakan bahawa pelajar-pelajar dari fakulti yang berlainan mengguna strategi-strategi 'self-directed learning' yang agak sama, tetapi terdapat perbezaan dari segi susunan kepentingan terhadap pelajaran mereka. Dalam perbandingan pelajar lelaki dan perempuan dengan pengunaan 'self-directed learning strategies', didapati pelajar perempuan selalu mengguna 'self-directed learning strategies' dalam akademik mereka. Haisl kajian mengimplikasikan bahawa pendidik-pendidik merupakan faktor yang penting and mereka harus meningkatkan factor-faktor dalaman pelajar untuk meninggikan kemahiran 'self-directed learning' untuk memastikan mereka berjaya dalam pelajaran. Manakala institusi and fakulti gagal memberi sokongan yang cukup kepada pelajar dan hal demikian akan menjejaskan potensi bagi pelajar untuk menjadi seorang mahasiswa yang berdikari dan bertanggungjawab dalam pelajaran mereka (self-directed learner). Cadangan-cadangan bagi kajian penyelidikan yang akan datang juga disarankan dalam kertas ini untuk meningkatkan dan memperbaiki kelemahan dalam kajian ini.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Centre of Language Studies   - CLS

Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development   - FSKPM

Faculty of Medicine and Health Science   - FPSK

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology   - FSTS

Faculty of Applied and Creative Art   - FSGK

Faculty of Computer Sciences and Information Technology - FIT

Faculty of Economy and Business   - FEB

Faculty of Social Sciences   - FSS

Faculty of Engineering   - FK

Personality Responsibility Model   - PRO

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak   - Unimas

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0   Chapter Overview

This chapter briefly describes the background of the study, statement of problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, the definition of particular key terms and the scope of the study.

1.1   Background of Study

Self-directed learning always rises up issues to be discussed since 19 century, especially in terms of its learning definition from different perspectives and its particular name. The terms are defined differently due to vary learning contexts such as self-directed learning in distance learning, self-directed learning in adult learning and so on.

Hiemstra (1994) gives an overview on the historical background of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning which is termed as self-study is emerged in classical antiquity and it played a vital role in the lives of Greek philosophers such as Socrates,

Plato, and Aristotle. Hosmer then uses the terms self-education which refer to the learning process that require learners to direct their own learning (as cited in Guglielmino, Long & Hiemstra, 2004). Self-education is described as a way to acquire knowledge without the help from teachers, particularly no verbal instruction and the learners usually learned in uncompelled condition. Therefore, learning only occurs when learners' internal change is facilitated via managing of external conditions. Gibbons and Phillips (1982) also viewed that this type of learning is typically happened in informal context, namely outside the school (as cited in Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

After that, the term 'self-direction in learning' is used in describing independent learning process taken by learners. It is drastically different from self-education in the respect of definition and its concept. In 1984, Brookfield distinguishes the context of learning process in self-education and self-direction in learning by defining that individuals who 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 (as cited in Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991).

The term 'self-directed learning' started to emerge in the Brookfield's writing, a theorist in adult education. Brookfield also asserted that self-directed learning emphasizes the process of internal change in learners themselves (as cited in Tuinjman, 1995). Thus, educator no longer acts as a resourceful professional but as a facilitator or monitor towards students' learning process. They hold the responsibility to stimulate the authority for learners' self-direction and transmit the skills to them and assure that they are capable to direct their own learning. In short, learners learn for the sake of attaining new knowledge and for personal development in an initiative way.

Many researches have been done on the different types of learning approaches like problem-solving learning, self-regulated learning and others. However, some researches indicated that there is a high tendency for university students to choose self-directed learning as a learning approach for adult students because they can learn at their own pace and deal with their learning based on their set learning goals or objectives. A research conducted by Park, Candler and Durso (2005) reported that the first and second year medical students valued self-directed learning as the most effective learning method for them to gain wider knowledge if compared with other active learning modes such as problem-based learning and team-based learning.

Moreover, there are a lot of synthesized researches of self-directed learning that have been done by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Candy (1991), Merriam and Caffarella (1991) and others. Hiemstra (1994) reported a study conducted by Confessore and Confessore in year 1992 which involved 22 self-directed learning experts from several countries to investigate some particular areas such as several instruments for measuring some self-directed learning aspects have been developed, self-directed learning readiness that has been related with a performance, psychological, and social variables and practice implications and techniques for facilitating self-directed learning.

Some researches are conducted to reveal the myths of this learning approach. In the early perception, self-directed learning is deemed as a learning approach that work alone without any help, for instance self-education used by Greek philosophers which is mentioned before. However, Peter and Gray (2005) opposed the definition of self-education in learning by declaring that self-directed learning needs the help from authority or others to give guidance for the learners to be creative and responsive in learning. Hiemstra (1985) and Moore (1989) also supported that students are not able to be self-directed learner without the help from the other scholars. So those claims showed that self-directed learning is a collaborative process.

Furthermore, many researches have also been done on the readiness of self-directed learning in relation to factors such as age, gender and culture by using Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale to help students to become aware of their self-directed learning preference. Fisher, King & Tague (2001) stated that Guglielmino, in year 1977, had designed a Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale in order to measure an individual's potential for self-directed learning. According to Reio and Davis (2005), there was a significant interaction between gender and age in self-directed readiness. This result indicated that the readiness for self-directed learning was increased in line with the age of the learners. It also discovered that young adult female had higher scores in self-directed learning readiness than the male. In short, this research revealed that adult learners were more suitable to be exposed to self-directed learning if compared to the schooling students.

The university undergraduates are expected by the lecturers or professors to be able to in-charge or take their own responsibility in their learning because they are more mature and possess higher critical thinking skills than the younger learners due to the learning environment requirement. They are also expected to be independence and responsible in their learning and decision making as well. Adult students are more complex and have more sophisticated insights, they always bring the knowledge that have learned in classroom to apply in their career; skills developed at home and at work; and also turn the experiences of a wide variety of relationships into learning. They are more likely to see how ideas can become actions and theory can become practice. Thus, it is essential to investigate the learning strategies for self-directed learning and to recognize the internal and external factors that facilitate students' self-directed learning because it is very meaningful for the adult students to take their responsibility in developing their learning skills and strategies.

1.2   Statement of Problem

According to Nongkran Wongsri, Cantwell and Archer (2002), most adult learners spend much time in acquiring information and learning new skills. Due to the continuous creation of new knowledge, they need to take initiative to access the knowledge through various ways.

In Malaysia educational curriculum, the educators promote pedagogical approach in primary and secondary education for teaching and learning. This is because the younger learners lack of the skill or ability to diagnose their needs and they need teachers or school's administrators to assist in their learning in order to have better academic achievement. In short, the educators in primary and secondary school carry a high responsibility in providing adequate information to assist students in their academic aspects. They take the primary role as resource of knowledge rather than as a facilitator or knowledge prompter. Due to examination orientation circumstance, the educators bear the responsibility to supply as much knowledge as they could to ensure their students get an excellent score in their academic performance. The learners are placed in the role of receptive, and they are required to be active in certain extent such as in the subject of science, mathematic but not language subjects or others. This learning context has applied traditional pedagogical approach whereby learning relies heavily on drilling and memorization. Inevitably, the oppressive and controlling habits of traditional education prevent adults from observing the learners as an individual (Hiemstra, 1985).

However, this trend of learning and teaching is drastically different from the advance level of university if compared with the primary and secondary education. Knowles has initiated the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework and named it as 'Andragogy' approach that need to apply in adult learning and to differentiate between the young schooling and adult learning (as cited in Merriam,

2001). They were putting more demands on the undergraduates to discover and acquire the knowledge themselves. The undergraduates no longer got the resources from the educator because tertiary education offers lifelong learning for endless knowledge. Thus, undergraduates needed to become highly self-directed learners in order to meet the changing demands from society, institutional and technological needs.

According to Jaehnig (2008), there are a lot of adult education theorists who advocate the use of an andragogical approach over a traditional pedagogical approach when teaching adults learners. In andragogical approach, the educators need to design a self-directed learning process to assist the learners to identify their needs and then acquire necessary and appropriate knowledge based on their needs. Therefore, resourceful educators or professionals in higher education need to create conditions that encourage educators to facilitate self-directed learning for students to be more effective in helping students to develop personally in their learning. In the nutshell, instructors need to scaffold learner's learning because a good learning exists when a learner is guided by an expert of knowledge and lead him or her to the independent stage. Teachers have to model learning strategies and work with students so that they develop the ability to use learning strategies on their own.

However, students' self-directed learning strategies are affected in the respect of own learning design. In short, the design of strategy that makes the learning goals achievable by individuals are varied from various differences in emphasizing on their abilities to organize, engage in knowledge acquisition, and decision making on the learning resources. Due to different learners' needs and learning context, their self-directed learning strategies might not be similar to certain extent (Thompson & Wulff, 2004).

In order to foster undergraduates' self-direction in learning and its learning strategies to direct oneself, teachers need to model some useful learning strategies like predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. So, this study investigated Unimas undergraduates' favorite strategies in facilitating their self-directed learning (external factors), how these strategies were affected by the internal factors and the self-directed learning strategies that they deployed most often in their learning.

1.3 Objectives of Study

This study aimed to:

1. identify Unimas undergraduates' preference strategies to facilitate self-directed learning
2. identify the internal factors that affect students' degree to be self-directed learner
3. describe the relationship of students' internal factors and their preference facilitation strategies to develop self-directed learning
4. identify Unimas undergraduates' favorite self-directed learning strategies
5. investigate the interaction of students' deployment of self-directed learning strategies in terms of gender, year-levels and among the faculties

1.4 Research Questions

a) What were the types of strategies that students prefer most to facilitate self-directed learning?
b) What was the most influential factor that affect students' degree to be self-directed learners?
c) Were the students' internal factors and facilitation strategies have any interaction effect of self-directed learning?

d) What were the self-directed learning strategies that Unimas students most often applied in their learning?

e) Was there any interaction between students' deployment of self-directed learning strategies in terms of
   i)   year-levels
   ii) gender
   iii) faculties

f) Was there any difference on students' deployment on self-directed learning strategies in terms of
   i)   year-levels
   ii) gender
   iii) faculties

1.5 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine what strategies are more appropriate to be used in developing students' self-directedness based on their learning needs and types of internal factors that impact their self-directed learning attitude. This enables the lecturer and student to have better understanding on their teaching-learning process and thus students together with the lecturer able to cope the problems with suitable innovation of instructional or learning approaches to be more directed in initiating own learning.

Throughout this research, the lecturers also know the type of students' learning strategies that they applied to direct their own learning. Tsay, Morgan & Quick (2000) reported that students needed more opportunity and supports to develop their self-directed learning attitude. Therefore, results from this study contributed some guides for the lecturers to adapt their teaching methods along with students' perceptions on their preferred strategies to facilitate of self-directed learning and to match different

levels of self-directness that students performed in different situations. It also helps the lecturers to recognize the proper way to facilitate students' degree to be self-directed so that they can take full responsibility to extract additional knowledge.

For students, they know the importance to be self-directed in acquiring knowledge in tertiary education. Ramnarayan and Hande (2005) view the teaching of facts or subject contents seem less important than ensuring students to possess the skills to learn and relearn to develop their knowledge. This study enables the students to test on and realize their satisfaction and degree of self-direction in order to adapt their learning strategies based on self-reliance to fix on the unlimited learning resource throughout their life. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2004) claims that self-concept provides the foundation for a student to seek for their personal attributes to become a self-directed learner. It is more effective when the educators understand students' traits and then further foster them. So, the interaction between lecturers and students can help to increase students' ability to be self-directing and also enhance the confidence among them.

1.6   Definition of Terms

The definitions below are used to define certain specific terms which serves as important key terms to be used this research study.

1.6.1   Self-Directed Learning

It can be defined as learner who participates cognitively and actively in the learning process, include learners who take the initiative to identify their learning needs, identify resources for learning, evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles as cited in Hoban & Hoban, 2004) goal setting and planning, information processing and active construction of new knowledge, self-monitoring on learning progress, self-

adjustment based on feedback, the control of learning environment for effective learning and selection and implementation of learning strategies (Gollwitzer, McCombs, Zimmerman & Chan as cited in Mok, Leung & Shin, 2005). Reio and Davis (2005) also claimed that the learning process is moved from teacher-centered to learner-centered and learner takes control of the learning situation to include where, when, what, and how new information is to be incorporated into new knowledge based on their experiences. In this study, self-directed learning is a process for learner to diagnose their needs, discover own learning, to develop their goals for learning, to determine their learning strategies, take full control on their learning task and monitoring and evaluating progress in relation to their knowledge of particular subjects matter.

1.6.2 Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) defined learning strategy as a mean for planning, competition, conscious manipulation, and movement toward a goal. Learning strategies are also deemed as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Besides, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) also defined learning strategies as behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning and that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process learners. Thus, in this study, learning strategy is the mean or approach that students selected and implemented to facilitate their learning based on their particular needs and learning goals.

1.6.3   Faculty

Faculty can be defined as a learning context that plays an important role in how students approach their learning tasks (Beatie, Collins & McInnes; Biggs; Biggs & Moor as cited in Laird, Schwarz, Shoup & Kuh, 2005). Faculty and the educational

environment like course structure, curriculum content, and methods of teaching and assessment (learning context) shape whether a student will gravitate toward their learning strategies. Therefore, National Research Council and Zeegersas stated that learners' learning approaches could vary among different fields of study (as cited in Laird, Schwarz, Shoup & Kuh, 2005). In this study, faculty are referred as a institution that determine and make influence of students learning strategies due to the differences of curriculum content, methods of teaching and assessment as well. Faculties in Unimas that are involved in this research study are FSKPM, FEB, FSGK, FK, FSS, FPSK, FSTS and FIT.

1.6.4 Internal Factors

In this study, internal factors centre on the learners' internal or personal characteristics that will be enhanced or developed by the external conditions. The examples of the internal factors are self-directed readiness to learn, motivation and self-concept.

1.6.5 External Factors

External factors in this research study refer to learners' preferences strategies to facilitate self-directed learning in external condition such as instructional method, institutional support, personal interactions and others. Besides, the external factors have very influential impact on students' degree to be self-directed learners and it also helps to shape students' internal change on their willingness to learn something new.

1.7   Scope of Study

Henschke and Cooper (no date) assert that andragogy and self-directed learning are the pillars of adult learning theory but this study focused only on self-directed learning. As Hiemstra (1982) stated that many leaders in higher education have begun the program development activities which aimed at increasing self-directed learning opportunities. Besides, there are a wide range of issues which can be investigated in order to get a deeper insight on self-directed learning which serves as an approach in learning. The examples of the issues are the role of technology in self-directed learning, way of measuring and maintaining quality in self-directed learning, way for the organization to facilitate self-directed learning and enhancing critical thinking skill and so forth. However, this study only investigated on types of self-directed learning strategies that often used in learning and how undergraduates' internal change was facilitated by external factors. According to Smith and Associates (1990), it is important to describe how learners can be helped to learn, ask critical questions and reflect on what they are learning. With this reason, University of Malaysia Sarawak was chosen as sample for the research to investigate on this problem. Eight faculties in Unimas were selected as participants and one program was chosen to represent each of the faculty because these programs were categorized into faculties based on the differences of disciplinary. According to Laird, Schwarz, Shoup & Kuh, (2005), every faculty has different learning context and it varies learners' learning strategies. So it is very important for this research to look into this area to provide further insight of students and educator for future improvement on educational inspiration goals and aims.

1.8   Chapter Review

This chapter has discussed on the historical background of self-directed learning in brief, the problem of this study and the research objectives that needed to be