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The Role of Self-Directed Learning Strategy in Higher Education

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Abstract

If there is any difficulty or dilemma in choosing a right path, the teacher is there to support and guide. The teacher could show you, make you understand which is right and suitable for you and it is your duty to begin the journey from which point you become the authority of every step of yours. Instead, if you wish your teacher to hold your hands and walk along, I am afraid there is no justice preserved. It is to say, as a learner you have misunderstood what real learning is and your master has misapprehended what true teaching is. Neither of you have discovered anything at all.

It is primarily the aim of this paper to examine the necessity for self-directed learning in higher educational context especially in India. Additionally, it will also present some useful suggestions on how to facilitate the self-directed learning strategy in our day-to-day teaching.

Introduction

Learning could be extremely rewarding if observation is attentive and properly utilized. There are many who possess multi-disciplinary knowledge and talents. Such individuals have qualified themselves for such merits by years of self-education and immeasurable practice.

What is to be learnt is first of all observed well. The nuances and dimensions are comprehended one after another and digested. Initially, the ability to imitate produces a great effect in the process of building our learning. Thus, after sufficient practice the potential to produce a product of originality is attained. For instance, no bird is ever taught to fly, it is by observation the young ones make their progression. It is the same observational skill that makes the cubs to develop the strategy required to catch a prey. We would never have got Shakespeare if he had not closely observed the stage of his day or if he had considered himself ineligible due to the lack of formal education.

Self-directed Learning

It is the capacity to be self-directed that makes one qualified to be successful in any individual's attempts. In such an autodidactic learning structure, observation is just one of the components. Self-directed learning or autodidacticism has been a popular area of study for several years. According to Malcolm Knowles, Self-directed learning is 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 (Knowles, 1990).

Need for Self-Directed Learning in India

Most of the learning condition in India, whether it be elementary, high school or college level, is neither effective nor educative. This is especially true in terms of analysing the learners knowledge and competence in English. It has become very usual to see so many individuals with postgraduate and even research degrees unable to produce a grammatically right sentence of their own in English. The main cause for it in my point of view is the lack of quality in the educational system that we follow. Moreover, the condition is such that anyone with an eligible degree could step into the teaching profession whether he is qualified to it or not. For a mere reason of securing employment many enter into the teaching field and most of them have no passion for teaching. It is not my purpose to complain, but it is simply unavoidable to question the educational standards for the benefit of the learners.

Some teachers are so traditional and not aware of modern developments that they still follow the same old procedure in handling their subjects. I have directly come across many tutors who have been dominant and authoritative in their teaching that they never even care about the requirements of the learners. Such a military teaching which is merely informative and never allows the learners to be independent and original is not going to be helpful in anyway. Such teachers create a mindset or impression on the learners that they have no other way than to be dependent followers of them. Even if the learners are talented they hesitate to come forward as an independent learner since they have been deprived of such opportunities.

Such a kind of repeated instruction shapes the learners as machines that could only work when operated. They keep listening, listening and listening until they get bored of the whole thing and ultimately lose interest in the end. Though in recent years the way of teaching has moved from traditional to communicative, the growth is still unsatisfactory specifically in India. Teachers must take prime interest to create an atmosphere in which learners could maximum work on their own. They need to support, motivate and trigger the learners's ability to be independent, creative and original in their learning process.

Learners could enrich their knowledge and boost their experience by experimenting things on their own. If learners are trained to be dependent it would without doubt affect their growth in both academic and public context. Learning in India could be an excellent experience to growing learners if the educational institutions could reconsider their approach to teaching especially in the elementary level through implementing suitable self-directed learning exercises in their curriculum. By facilitating self-directed learning strategy at the elementary level itself, it is possible to bring an exceptional difference in the quality of education.

Learners and Their Self-directed Learning

In a self-directed learning situation, learners take complete control of their learning. They fulfill their learning needs by participating in self-learning with or without depending on others. While formal learning cannot be ignored, self-directed learning plays an important role in our lives. The ability to attain our goals depends on the fact how well we apply the principles of self-learning in our day-today actions. In order to understand why self-directed learning is important and necessary, it is essential to learn the distinction between the teacher-directed and self-directed environment.

Major Differences between Teacher-directed and Self-directed Learning

The following table lists the major differences underlying the concepts of teacher-directed and self-directed learning:

Teacher-Directed Learning		Self-Directed Learning
Process	The process of learning is controlled by the teacher and learners are supposed to strictly adhere to the regulations laid by the institution or teacher throughout the learning process.	In the self-directed learning condition, the learners have full control of their learning. Depending on the requirements they manage their learning.

Limitations	In a formal educational situation learners are mostly enrolled in a particular course in which limitations are present and the only objective is to complete the course through a project, test or examination.	The concept of self-directed learning does not restrict to anything. Based on what the learners want to learn, the amount of learning could extend as much as it is needed. Learners have the liberty to learn what they want to learn in their own way and style.
Actions	Learners have less or no opportunities to decide their actions. They are to blindly follow the pre-established framework of learning as well as the directions of the instructor.	All or most of the actions and decision-making is associated with the learners. It is they who decide the what-how-when matters of learning.
Goal	Goal is determined and set by the course providers. Learners are required to learn the content selected and prescribed.	In the self-directed learning situation, it is the learner who determines what is to be learnt depending on the nature of goal he wishes to attain.
Monitoring	In the teacher –directed learning condition, the performance of the learners is monitored by the teacher who is the only source of feedback, suggestion and motivation.	Learners monitor their performance, make necessary changes in their course of actions and adapt to the learning situations on their own. They are self-motivated and in most cases fulfill all learning needs on their own.
Evaluation	Learners lack opportunities to evaluate themselves. For the most part it is the teacher who identifies and corrects the problems of the learners.	Learners are able to self-evaluate the outcomes of their learning process. Such an experience paves a splendid way for the learners to identify and analyse what went wrong and take the necessary steps to overcome difficulties on their own.

When learners have the independence to choose their learning matter and manage the learning process on their own, an immense difference is visible in their performance level. It is primarily because, these learners are learning what they wanted to learn and in the way they wanted it to be learnt. Unlike a formal learning condition where there is no room for independency, here, learners could actually do what they want and take decisions suitable to them on their own or collaborating with anyone. Right from the selection of the content or subject, choosing appropriate resources, setting objectives and goals, fixing the learning strategies and up to

monitoring, managing and evaluating the whole learning process the responsibility lies entirely with the learners.

Benefits of Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is a great tool for both in-class and out-class context. Normally, learners under a teacher-directed situation remain passive as they have been trained to act according to the instructions. The case is just similar to the traditional teacher belief that learners are incapable to learn on their own, handle situations for themselves and eventually lack the necessary skills and knowledge to act independently. It was commonly believed that learners could succeed in their tasks only under the direction of the teacher.

After the proposal of the communicative principles, the entire perspective of learning and teaching experienced a change. Teacher was not anymore considered to be the controller of the class, learners were not anymore mere listeners instead they were active participants. Teaching strategies moved from mere book-reading to a lively environment facilitating more interaction. Such a change was in fact a contributing factor for the innovations in the field.

Now, things have changed better. Teacher-direction has become limited and learners are given full priority to establish their own learning. The ability to self-direct has created confidence, learners have learnt how to determine what is important to them, they are good in selecting that which is appropriate from the different possibilities available to them, and they have also understood how to deal with complicated situations in the learning context. Self-directed learning has made it possible for the learners to develop observational, cognitive and processing skills enabling them to be successful self-directed learners.

Work Place and Self-directed Learning

Not just in a classroom context, it is indeed a great advantage to be self-directed in nature even in the workplace. It is difficult to be a successful self-directed worker all of a sudden. People who have failed to experience self-direction in their early life show lots of difficulties in their progression both in education and profession. Employers are very concerned regarding the workmanship of their employees. They are highly selective and seek for individuals who have multi-talents. Employers are in constant need of workers who are capable:

- a. To handle their work successfully
- b. To be successful in individual and cooperative conditions
- c. To communicate effectively at any given situation
- d. To identify and solve problems
- e. To apply their learning in their places of work
- f. To learn from their experiences and improve their work performance

Being autodidactic in nature is highly helpful in all walks of our life. Self-directed learning strategy has attracted great attention over the number of years from its initial implementation

with the adult learning context which has in the course of time progressed and influenced the elementary and the working environment as well.

Components of Successful Self-Directed Learning

Proper and timely functioning of the following components are necessary for any self-directed learning process to be successful. Unless every organ in our body functions in the way it has to be, it is not possible to be healthy and normal. Similarly, self-directed learning could become an accident and waste of time leading to failure if the components are improperly managed. It is very important to comprehend the components well and develop what is necessarily lacking in us. The outcome depends on how effectively the components are handled by the learners.

1. Ability to Observe

Observation makes matters easier to understand. It is the key element through which we familiarise with the world around us. Learners who fail to observe, obviously encounter difficulty, confusion and misunderstanding. To develop the ability to observe well it is important to learn to be focused, interested and distraction-free.

2. Information Processing

Unless there is an action there cannot be a reaction. All our reactions are indeed answers to some actions. The information acquired by us must be processed to be understood. If the information is processed, filtered and digested well, it is possible to react effectively.

3. Precise in Selection

It is depending on what is essential to him, a self-directed learner selects a subject for study. For instance, it is insane if a language learner wishes to master the languages of every nation. First of all, such a task is not practical. In case, he is genius enough to make it practical, it is of no valuable use. A successful self-directed learner chooses his content precisely depending on the nature of what he wishes to achieve.

4. Ability to Analyse

The knowledge to analyse things is highly important. Our learning experiments may go ineffective or wrong if we fail to analyse our course of actions properly from time to time.

5. Decision-Making

Learners should know how to make proper decisions. Most often we are thrown in situations in which there are necessity to make decisions. We would land up on something worse if we are unable to make any decisions or by mistake take any wrong decisions. However, learners should

also learn not to jump to sudden decisions. The success behind a self-directed learner lies in his ability to take right decisions in the right time in all of his learning actions.

6. Goal-Setting

Learners should be able to pre-determine their goals. They ought to know what would be the outcome before they have begun the actual learning process. They should also have a clear idea on how to progress successfully in order to attain the goal.

7. Self-Confidence

The process of self-directed learning could sometimes be difficult and may require much hard work. There are possibilities of conditions that we may even feel it is no more possible to continue. Learners may feel disinterested and dejected at times worrying about their learning outcomes. In order to tackle all such problems, learners should learn how to deal with such difficulties confidently. Improving self-confidence could be an effective measure against the pressures of the obstacles.

8. Self-Awareness

Learners should monitor their progress frequently. They should be aware of their learning process. Learners should possess the knowledge to know what is suitable to them and need to have a complete understanding about their weaknesses and strengths.

9. Managing Resources

Self-directed learners must be able to manage their learning resources systematically. Finding the apt resources could be somewhat complicated, but learners by all means try to get access to variety of resources to shape their learning into a quality one.

10. Motivation

No matter how difficult, how uninteresting the process of learning may be, learners should take care not to let down their spirit and motivational level.

11. Self-Evaluation

It is only by self-evaluation learners will be able to know if they have succeeded in their learning attempts. In order to judge how far they have gained the areas of knowledge and skills, it is crucial for the learners to become skilled at evaluating themselves.

Conclusion

Learning is definitely not very effective if learners are teacher-dependent. Especially concerning the higher educational context in India, there is an increasing necessity for the learners to develop the capability to complete tasks on their own. There are exceptionally few who come out as talented individuals in spite of many years of formal education.

To provide better experiences, instructors should guide the learners as minimum as possible encouraging them to work on their own. They should stop spoon-feeding and allow the learners to handle all situations independently. Specifically, concerning the evaluative measures like assignments, tests or examinations, it is not of a convincing level. In what way do they really enhance learners' performance and promote real independent learning is a question to be answered.

Majority of the assignment works are merely reproduced either by copying from various texts or borrowing the contents from the internet. Since, resources have become pretty easier to access, learners have adequate amount of information available to them. Examinations on the other hand have always been the most unproductive operations on testing the learners' knowledge. Simply reproducing whatever we have studied is in no way going to make us extraordinary.

We need to be formally taught to settle in a profession, but it is only with the help of self-learning even the average ones have reached extraordinary heights. What is really needed for our learners is the sole ability to self-direct themselves. As mentioned earlier, it is in the hands of our teachers to encourage the learners to develop their capacity to understand a situation, identify and investigate the problems associated with the particular learning situation and apply proper self-directed measures to overcome all difficulties.

Whether it be in matters of learning, in matters of occupation, or in matters of anything related to life, one has to have superior skills to successfully administer his own actions. It is the duty of teachers to make the learners aware of this self-directed strategy and should include as much as self-directed exercises as possible. Through self-directed tasks, learners would be well-exposed to autonomous environments where they would start operating on their own by involving in independent study, formulating learning objectives, developing their own knowledge of the subject, locating resources to support their learning, making personal judgments regarding their learning process, selecting and altering the methods as needed and finally ending in self-evaluation. Involving the learners in self-initiated learning shapes them as individuals with extraordinary talents. Self-directed learning process is in real sense never ending. Learners who are self-direct in nature keep on learning different things depending on their interests.

It would be better if educational institutions in India come forward to conduct special workshops frequently to discuss about various things like the inadequacies of our educational system, matters related to the redesigning of curriculum, proper implementation of global methodologies and take up the responsibility to encourage and train the teachers well so as to update their knowledge of the new developments. Only then teachers will be able to show interest, be committed to their profession and routinely engage their learners in variety of tasks and challenges knowing that their learners are to be shaped for the world and not just for the

classrooms. If more emphasis is laid on self-directed learning and if teachers are supportive enough to facilitate the learners to master the techniques of self-direction, learners would definitely perform better than our expectations.

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