



SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE

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Abstract

The article is on self-directed learning strategy on students academic performance on English language. This strategy describes a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of teachers in formulating their learning objectives. It is a process in which individuals set goals, locate resources, choose the method and evaluate progress through critical reflections. Similarly, this paper discusses among other variables to include; English language teaching methods, teacher centre-approach, students centre-approach, self-directed learning strategies, dimensions for self-directed learning. These strategies motivate students to learn without recourse to the teacher. This is why the method is regarded as self-directed learning strategy. Conclusion and recommendations were made after discussing the relevant points on the paper.

Introduction

Self-directed learning has become one of the primary aims of education in the last few decades. Self-direction is the basis of all types of learning (Williamson, 2017). All individuals are capable of self-directed learning but the degree of development varies due to their individual differences, including learning motivation, self-efficacy, self-esteem, conscientiousness, openness to experience, even intelligence. Self-directed learning contains three dimensions: motivation, metacognition, and self-regulation (Long, 2019).

Self-directed learning can be viewed as a process by which individuals set goals, locate resources, choose the method and evaluate progress through critical reflection (Brdokfield, 2015). The most frequently quoted definition of self-directed is the definition of Knowles: "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" (Knowles, 2017; 18).

Self-directed learning can be viewed as a process or as a psychological aspect, mainly as an attribute of personality. From this perspective, the self-directed learner is an individual with a high-degree of self-efficacy, intrinsically motivated, an individual who sets goals and chooses appropriate strategies to achieve those goals, and who is willing to meet new challenges (Garrison, 2019). Self-directed learning tends to be associated with strategies and academic achievement.

Strategy is a general plan to achieve one or more long-term or overall goals under conditions of uncertainty. In the sense of the "art of the general", which included several subsets of skills including

military tactics, siegecraft, logistics etc., the term came into use in the 6th century C.E. in Eastern Roman terminology, and was translated into Western vernacular languages only in the 18th century. From then until the 20th century, the word "strategy" came to denote "a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual use of other methods, in a dialectic of wills" in a military conflict, in which both adversaries interact. Strategy is important because the resources available to achieve goals are usually limited. Strategy generally involves setting goals and priorities, determining actions to achieve the goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the actions. Strategy can be intended or can emerge as a pattern of activity as the organization adapts to its environment or competes. It involves activities such as strategic planning and strategic thinking such as in teaching English language.

English language has become greatly valued and adorned in Nigeria's Educational system. As remarked by Bamgbose, Banjo & Thomas (2019), "the dominance of English in formal and transactional communication is unchallengeable". In view of the multilingual nature of Nigeria, with more than 400 indigenous languages (Wehmeyer, 2017), English language is regarded as the only feasible and realistic choice for the nation now and in the foreseeable future. The greatest efforts expended on English language in Nigeria have been in the area of the Educational system, particularly in relation to Nigerian indigenous languages of which the major ones are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Fulfulde, and Kanuri. English as the official language of Nigeria and also the former colonial language was chosen to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. English, however remains an exclusive preserve of the country's urban elite, and is not widely spoken in the rural areas which comprise three quarters of the country's population.

Self Directed Learning in English language Learning is a solution to the class-based traditional learning process which clearly has some disadvantages such as teacher-centered based, limited time and materials, collective-based (Paramartha, 2005) which can not accommodate the learners' various learning characteristics such as rationales, objectives, and methods of learning. Learning a language is unique that students are expected to be able to master four aspects altogether such as speaking, structure, listening, writing and pronunciation which require time, energy, materials and unlimited strategies. But thanks to the advance of technology which has brought some advantages for language learning from which learners may gain an unlimited number of learning materials. Technologies such as internet, computer, radio, with its facilities such as e-mail, chatting enable learners to learn English by accessing web-based materials, practice and evaluate the learning process independently. Learners may learn to write (writing) by sending e-mail of joining online-based communities, learn to read (reading) various text-based information and news on internet, learn to listen by listening to audio visual materials on internet or learn to speak (speaking) by practicing it using webcam.

Although the concept of independent learning has already been practiced in daily life for various activities, Self Directed Learning in a Self Accessed Learning Centre should be introduced to the students in the form of Procedure Operation Standard as guidance. The suggested procedure is as follow: (1) Students come into the Resource Centre or Self Access Learning Centre, (2) Select the English Self Accessed Materials available themselves, (3) Do the exercise, (4) Check their own answers with the keys answers, (5) Score their work, (6) hand it to the officer, (7) If they still have time, they can do another activity and if have no time can do it later, (8) the teacher periodically collect the students' works and make a record.

The components of self directed learning include the executive functioning learning strategy, metacognition learning strategy and socio-emotional learning strategy. Executive function (EF) refers to a set of self-regulatory cognitive processes that underlie goal-directed behavior and support individuals faced with new or complex situations (Miyake and Friedman, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a considerable interest in the early development of EF, particularly because EF measured in early childhood is a significant predictor of several developmental outcomes, including school readiness (Shaul and Schwartz, 2014) and academic achievement (Best et al., 2011).

Metacognition as the process of consciously monitoring our own thought process and a process is a form of looking over your own shoulders-observing yourself as you work and think about what they are thinking. Metacognition plays an important role in education because it helps learners to be capable of developing a plan, monitor and evaluate how much it is effective, that means metacognition helps the learners to be more involved in the learning process (Abdellah, 2015).

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) programs broadly aim to enhance an interrelated set of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills regarded as foundational for academic performance. Skills targeted by SEL programs include the recognition and management of emotions, appreciating others' perspectives, initiating and maintaining positive relationships, and using critical thinking skills to make responsible decisions and handle interpersonal situations (Zins and Elias, 2016).

Universal SEL programs include curricula designed to promote social-emotional skills among all children in a classroom. Some programs also integrate school wide and family components that target services at multiple developmental contexts (Greenberg, 2013). Most effective SEL programs are implemented by providing professional development (PD) and training to teachers. It is anticipated that teachers will then use the strategies taught in the PD sessions in their classrooms. Such implementation is often manualized in the curriculum and can be embedded into instruction or stand alone as its own program.

Self Directed Learning has long been considered by educational institutional or corporations because individuals who have the ability to do and get used to independent learning tend to gain more success either during study or work (Chou et al, 2007). Self Directed Learning is also closely related to the academic competency or to predict to what extent someone will succeed in their study. Darmayanti (1994; Hsu dan Shiue, 2007) proved a positive relations between ability of independent learning and academic achievement in ordinary learning environment. Self Directed Learning is based on the belief that an ideal learning process is how to make students learn something, not how the teacher teaches. A learning process should be able to motivate the students to move ahead and learn something. As argued by Gading (2014) that “what is actually important in a learning process is how to make the learners learn something, not of how the teacher performs in the class”.

In fact, most studies of self-directed learning counter the simple minded equation of self-directedness with isolation, stress instead how adults speak of their learning as being firmly embedded in social networks (Brookfield, 2013). As Knowles (2015) has made clear from the outset 'self-directed learning

Concept of English Language

English language has become greatly valued and adorned in Nigeria's Educational system. According to Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas (2019:82), “the dominance of English in formal and transactional communication is unchallengeable”. In view of the multilingual nature of Nigeria, with more than 400 indigenous languages (Wehmeyer, 2017), English is regarded as the only feasible and realistic choice for the nation now and in the foreseeable future. The greatest efforts expended on English language in Nigeria have been in the area of the Educational system, particularly in relation to Nigerian indigenous languages of which the major ones are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Fulfulde, and Kanuri. English as the official language of Nigeria and also the former colonial language was chosen to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. English, however remains an exclusive preserve of the country's urban elite, and is not widely spoken in the rural areas which comprise three quarters of the country's population.

Modern English grammar is the result of a gradual change from a typical Indo-European dependent marking pattern with a rich inflectional morphology and relatively free word order, to a mostly analytic pattern with little inflection, a fairly fixed subject-verb-objects (SVO) word order and a complex syntax.

Modern English relies more on auxiliary verbs and word order for the expression of complex tenses, aspect and mood, as well as passive constructions, interrogatives and some negation. Despite noticeable variation among the accents and dialects of English used in different countries and regions in terms of phonetics and phonology, and sometimes also vocabulary, grammar and spelling English-speakers from around the world are able to communicate with one another with relative ease (Aitken, 2019).

According to Littlewood (2019), language pedagogy has witnessed a gradual shift from teacher-centred to student centred starting from then, the focus has been on developing autonomous learning especially among second language (L2) students. The implication is that L2 learning nowadays has to consider learners' independence which requires much more from the students than from the teachers. Hence, learning strategies play a crucial role in facilitating the independence of English as second language (ESL) students. Consequently, ESL and English as a foreign language (EFL) studies have also moved towards establishing how employing learning strategies influences, facilitates and enhances the whole L2 learning process. According to Oxford and Crookall (2008) learning strategies are steps taken by language students to facilitate the whole process of acquisition, storage, retrieval, or using linguistic ways in information processing that enhance comprehension, learning or retention of learning. Oxford (2010) however, is of the opinion that learning strategies are specific actions taken to ensure that learning is made simpler, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, which can even be transferable to new situations. The relevance of learning strategies to L2 learning is to allow learners to take charge of learning by themselves.

Concept of Teaching Method

Teaching is a process of impacting knowledge which involves many activities on the part of the teacher and the learners (students). Teaching methods therefore includes these various means and activities of the teacher and learner in the learning process geared towards acquiring ideas, knowledge, skills and values that are built within the educational aims and objectives. According to O'Bannon (2012), teaching methods describe various ways information is presented to the students specifying the nature of the activities in which the teacher and the learner will be involved during the teaching and learning process.

Sawa (2012) from another perspective defined teaching methods as the framework on which what learners need to learn is conveyed to them by the teacher. In view of these definitions teaching methods can be asserted as primarily the description of learning objective oriented activities and the flow of information between teacher and students in the teaching and learning processes.

Teaching methods involve different activities of the teacher and the learner such as questioning, explanations', demonstration or directions. The activities can be referred to as skills or techniques; thus teaching method involves different techniques. The use of these techniques vary with different teaching methods and depend on many factors such as type of learning objectives, nature of subject, age of students, number of students among others. Hence, there are different types of teaching methods: Lecture/expository method, discussion, demonstration, recitation, lecture/discussion, Games and simulations, problem-solving, Role-play, scaffolding, inquiry learning among others. These different teaching methods are grouped by some educators (Shawnee, 2011; Sawa, 2012); O'Bannon, 2012 and Campbell, 2008) into two approaches: teacher-centered and student-centered.

Teacher-Centered Approach

Teacher-centered approach includes all the teaching methods that the teacher dominates in the lesson procedure and takes the lead in coordinating the classroom activities as regards to what to be done. O'Bannon (2002) stated that teacher-centered approach includes all the teaching methods grounded in behaviourism such as Lecture, demonstration, discussion and recitation. Teacher-centered classroom is thus rigidly structured and only factual information is conveyed to learners. For instance in the lecture method, the instructor presents fact and principles orally. In view of this, the lecture method has been criticized to be a poor method of teaching hand-on skills in sciences including English language though it provides for the effective use of time and manpower especially in presenting ideas to a large group of people. Considering other teacher-centered approaches O'Bannon (2012) described demonstration as a teaching method that involves the teacher showing students a process or procedure involved in a learning process.

The demonstration method has some advantages over the lecture method in skill acquisition, the disadvantage remains that the learners follow the rigidly prescribed probed procedure by the teacher and this makes it not effective for science teaching. Then the discussion method among other teacher-centered approach is a more advanced teacher-centered approach in which an issue in the learning content is posed as a question by the teacher and each of the students chips in different ideas etc. The discussion method also has its prone and cones with some degrees of student-centeredness as the teacher decide what is to be discussed. However, in all the mentioned teaching methods the teacher determines the content and the questions and takes upper control in the flow of information or knowledge hence they are considered as teacher-centered approach to teaching.

Student-Centered Approach

Student-centered approach include all teaching methods that underscore the teacher as a decision maker and problem solver in the classroom but rather see teachers as guides, facilitators, mentors, coach or consultants in the teaching and learning process. In the educational sector the term student-centered, child centered or learner-centered are interchangeably used to refer to teaching methods that allow students to share some degree of responsibility and decision making in the classroom. The student-centered approach is

opposed to the teacher centered approach that characterizes the traditional teaching methods which rests classroom decisions solely on the teachers.

According to O'Bannon (2012) student-centered approach is grounded in constructivism, with the epistemological view that learners are the architects of their own idiosyncratic meanings of concepts and natural phenomena. In view of this, student-centered approach is based on constructivists' principles and ideas. However Campbell (2006) inferred that the cognitive learning theory also advocate for student-centered idea. Thus student-centered approach is based on the constructivists as well as cognitive theories with the educational applications linked to the works of Dewey and Piaget among others. In discussing student centered teaching methods, such terms like constructivism, inquiry and discovery learning are often interchangeably used. Kirshner (2006), notes although these terms share some commonalities experts in each field observe some important differences.

Nevertheless, in today's educational discussions the term student-centered approach is a broad term that includes all innovative teaching methods that are usually activity oriented, where learners are expected to observe, analyze, synthesize and evaluate ideas or phenomena using materials or previous knowledge. Teaching methods emphasizing this approach include discovery, constructivism-related method (concept mapping, co-operative learning), problem solving, graphic organizers, know what to learn (KWL), role play, simulations and games and inquiry method etc. Educational Broadcasting Corporation (2014) notes that the principles of student-centered approach are linked to the philosophy of Rousseau' work Emile which stressed on the intuitive nature of children to investigation and learning naturally from the environmental experience.

Self-Directed Learning Strategies

Self-directed learning is clearly a multifaceted concept that should not be approached through one perspective. According to Kerka (2014), the biggest misconception may be in trying to capture the essence of self-directed learning in a single definition. Walt (2019) also pointed to the terminological confusion regarding this concept, which has led to communication difficulties about the subject of self-directed learning. Walt (2019), concludes that researchers in the field of self-directed, learning have two options. One is to continue the terminological confusion by defining their understanding of the concept, or, as a second option, they can depart their research from the original definition of self-directed learning provided by Knowles and his colleagues. In the following, some notions of the self-directed learning concept are accounted for.

Self-directed learning entails individuals taking initiative and responsibility for their own learning. One are free to set goals and define what is worth learning. Self-directed learning can take place both inside and outside of formal educational institutions. When teachers are involved, they should be facilitators of learning, not transmitters. What is common to most conceptualizations, according to Garrison (2017), is the notion of some personal control over either or both the planning (goals) and the management (support) of the learning experience.

Garrison (2017) also accentuates that the ultimate goal of self-directed learning is not necessarily fully autonomous learning because it is a matter of degree. Self-directed learning does not entirely depend on the opportunity but also the ability to make learning decisions. Therefore, according to Garrison (2017),

in a formal learning situation, it should be seen as a collaborative process between the teacher and the learner. Seen from a critical point of view, it is incomplete to reduce self-direction to a question of external control. "We live interdependently and knowledge is socially determined.

Brookfield (2015) also criticizes self-directed learning for ignoring social context by focusing on the individual, isolated learner and stresses the social construction of knowledge and the social context of learning. Merriam and Caffarella (2014) call for a wider recognition of the interdependent and collaborative aspects of self-directed learning. O'Donnell (2016) went the furthest in emphasizing the collective over individual dimension when he presents a rationale for what he calls "selves-directed learning. Garrison (2017) claims that the individual does not construct meaning in isolation; to take responsibility of your own learning does not necessarily mean to make decisions in isolation. Garrison (2017) defines self-directed learning as "an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive (self-monitoring) and contextual (self-management) processes in constructing and confirming meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes". The scholar states that meaningfulness reflect the cognitive and social perspectives of an educational experience. This understanding of self-direction is a "collaborative constructivist" perspective, according to Garrison. "A collaborative perspective has the individual taking responsibility for constructing meaning including the participation of others in confirming worthwhile knowledge.

One of Knowles's assumptions about adult learners is that their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards being a self-directed human being. Knowles (2010) does not emphasize interdependent and collaborative aspects of self-directed learning in his definition: In its broadest v meaning, self-directed learning describes a process by which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance 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.

Dimensions of Self-Directed Learning

Different perceptions of self-directed learning can also be expressed as dimensions, divided on the basis of different features or attributes of self-directed learning. Several authors have contributed to this sort of classification. Candy (2011) used two interacting dimensions in his definition of self-directed learning. One dimension is control within an institutional setting. One extreme of this dimension is the educator's full control of how the content is to be presented, what is to be studied, and what outcomes are expected. The opposite extreme is where the learner has full control over the learning experience. According to Candy (2011), self-direction is an outcome of the interaction between a person and the environment. In -his opinion, the focus on autonomy has limited the understanding of self-directed learning, leading to a mismatch when implementing it in an educational setting. If the learner lacks appropriate skills or self-confidence for self-directed learning, the opportunity to be autonomous is purposeless.

The other dimension in Candy's (2011) definition is learner control in situations outside the formal institutional setting. In this dimension, the student makes the decisions about learning, such as what is to be learned, what are the learning activities, when and where will the learning activities take place, and how to evaluate the learning outcomes. Candy refers to this as "autodidaxy".

Brockett and Hiemstra (2012) also use two dimensions in their definition. The first one is personal responsibility in the teaching-learning process. In this dimension, self-direction is a process where learners assume primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process.

The second dimension is personal responsibility in one's own thoughts and actions. In this dimension, self-directed learning is referred to as a goal. Learners may have control over their response to a situation even if they do not have control over the actual circumstances in which they need to react (Long, 2018). There are many other definitions of self-directed learning. Dehnad et al. (2014) concluded that there is no consistency in defining it. Long (2019) identifies three dimensions of self-directed learning: sociological, pedagogical, and psychological.

The sociological dimension emphasizes the social isolation of the learner, claiming that self-directed learning is usually associated with social independence in the learning situation. Then, learning will take place independently of others in a socially isolated situation. Web-based learning might be an example of self-directed learning in a sociological sense. A main point is that the learning activities should not be determined by one or another social authority. This is the autonomous, independent individual undertaking learning for personal growth.

The pedagogical dimension implies that the pedagogical "procedures" are performed by the learner. Whether the learning can be defined as self-directed depends on the degree of freedom when it comes to determining learning goals and influence on planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as other things associated with the pedagogical parts of learning activities. Seen from the pedagogy side, self-direction can be learned and developed and is considered a goal. This means that self-directed learning can take place without social isolation. Self-directed learning can take place in groups as well or in cooperation with institutions or others. Neither social isolation nor total independence is necessary.

Psychological self-direction is about the personal characteristics of the learner, including focus on necessary abilities and skills to carry out self-directed learning. Psychologically, self-directed learning is a question of to what extent the learner maintains an active control of the learning process. The mental activities are in focus. The most important are not the external factors but the inner psychological control in the learning situation. Here, Long underlines the importance of the individual experiencing- a personal control of the learning situation, despite external factors. Long (2019) argued that psychological self-directedness is necessary for self-directed learning, meaning that the learner must take the responsibility for a critical judgement of the content. In his view, when the learner is not in active control of the learning process, it is not psychological self-directedness. A meaningful or emancipatory learning experience must not deny the integrity and freedom of the individual. At the same time, adult educators must not ignore the potential of others to support the individual in acquiring and applying useful and worthwhile knowledge.

Self-Directed and Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning and self-directed learning: why don't some neighbours communicate?" This question is raised by Cosnefroy and Carre (2015); seminal definitions of both terms show a great deal of notional overlap. Loyens et al. (2018) stated that, semantically speaking, there is little doubt that self-directed learning and self-regulated learning are close neighbours and can be considered as synonymous. They conclude that even scholars in educational psychology have suggested that the terms have often been

used interchangeably in the literature. With no doubt, at first sight, self-directed learning and self-regulated learning seem highly similar (Umeh, 2012), and several recent articles use both notions indifferently as if they were accepted synonyms. Loyens et al. (2018) described it this way: Clearly, both SDL and SRL carry an element of student control. However, the degree of control the learner has, specifically at the beginning of the learning process when the learning task is defined, differs in SDL and SRL. In SDL, the learning task is always defined by the learner. A self-directed learner should be able to define what needs to be learned. In SRL, the learning task can be generated by the teacher. In this sense, SDL can encompass SRL, but the opposite does not hold.

Conclusion

Self-directed strategy is a strategy that would improve the learning outcome at a students in various degrees. This is because the strategy helps or assists to understand what the teacher has taught without further stress. It helps to improve the overall performance of a learner. It is imperative to note that self-directed learning strategy moves from one being dependent to self independent in knowledge seeking. It emphasizes independent in learning process.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made on the study

1. Teachers of English language should use self-directed strategy to improve students understanding of the subject.
2. Students should be encouraged to apply self-directed learning strategy to improve their learning skills.
3. Government should provide logistics that would improve the teaching of English language and the use of self-directed learning strategy.

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