



Self-directed Learning in Language Teaching-learning Processes

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ABSTRACT

Advances of modern technology in education, specifically in language education render a large amount of easy-access resources, knowledge and information to language learners. Therefore, it is essential to train students who value autonomous and self-directed learning; i.e. learners who are responsible for their own learning process, style, progress and evaluation. Students learn a lot of things and obtaining plenty of knowledge from various resources which affect different aspects of their daily life including decision making; thus, self-directed learning (SDL) has a significant role in academic life nowadays; students can learn independently from using their own experiences and other available sources. The present paper investigates the importance of self-directed learning in education, specifically in language teaching-learning processes and it highlights the main features of SDL and technology relation, SDL and linguistic enhancement and SDL implementation requirements.

1. Introduction

Many studies have already been conducted on the importance of learning development through teaching and instruction at higher education context to enhance learning rather than instructing and to emphasize on assisting and simulating students to obtain knowledge by learning and as well as how to learn rather than being instructed; thus, instruction and education management has up to now pursued the concept that students should be capable of learning and also developing their knowledge by themselves and that the learner is undoubtedly the main and the most significant person in the process of learning. Additionally, the labor market nowadays demands graduates with sound attributes of problem solving capacity and individuals who are able to think creatively and critically. Therefore, classroom management is crucial and it is of significant importance that teachers need to help students to develop their self directed learning. The learners, in fact, decide about their needs and the objectives of such self directed learning, and also design the experience, knowledge and resources that can support it, and they eventually evaluate themselves. With creating a learning environment conducive to students-centered learning in which the learners have the active role in learning process, the teachers in fact do not take a role more than being facilitators.

2. Review of Literature

Williamson (2007) depicts that SDL is a process of learning in which learner has the main responsibility and

work individually and independently in their learning process. According to Shannon (2008), in SDL process learners are responsible and managers of their own learning activities and processes. Hendry and Ginns (2009) defined SDL as a process in which learners make decisions for their own studies. In other words, learners have the responsibility to decide about their own learning processes.

Garrison (1997) depicts a model focusing on various dimensions of SDL, including self-monitoring that involves cognitive capabilities, self-management which involves contextual control, and finally a motivational factors that requires act of entering and task. As shown in the following figure:

Fig 1. SDL Dimensions



If the students grasp that they can positively impact their learning situation and learning process and become competent and motivated enough to do so, they can make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning process. According to O'Shea (2003) students who pose SDL skills need regulation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, control and success during their learning activities. As Boyer and Kelly (2005) assert, learners who can have a control over their own learning activities and experiences will be able to easily transfer and convey whatever they have already learnt. If the students perceive that they can significantly affect their learning process and obtain the competence and necessary skills to do so, they take more responsibilities and make decisions for their learning situation. Some of the SDL skills can be individual's attitude towards taking more responsibility in learning process, eagerness for studying and learning, time management, challenging and solving problems and controlling and assessment.

According to Long (2007), SDL skills can be classified in two major areas including general skills (cognitive and information processing skills) and personal characteristics. It has been highlighted that a SDL learner should be able to determine learning objectives, recognizing suitable resources for learning, applying appropriate learning strategies, controlling and assessing the learning outcomes. According to Knapper and Cropley (2000), being more active in academic and non-academic situations, assessing learning, being able to learn from teachers and as well as peers, gathering necessary information from different sources, monitoring and applying various learning strategies in different contexts.

Koc (2007) asserts that SDL learners should have some characteristics such as a good impression of taking responsibilities for their learning, eagerness for engaging in continuous learning, being capable of understanding how to learn, how to read for comprehension, written and as well as communication skills, competence about information technologies, knowledge of strategies for efficient learning, high capacity of thinking skills for example critical thinking and problem solving ability, and social and research skills.

3. SDL and Technology

The advances in modern technology during the past decade have provided a large amount of learning resources and information for language learners and the increasing need for working and dealing with these resources of information and innovations in teaching and learning languages in classrooms has highlighted

and intensified the rising demand for instructing language learners who are self-directed, independent, autonomous and responsible for their own learning process. According to Bonk (2010) learning is now becoming more informal and self-directed. Learners can make decisions over learning content, timing, location, methods and paths of learning. With the fast progress of technology, a significant number of online learning resources have established an informal learning in which individuals are allowed to learn just on demand and when they want and needed to learn. According Moradi (2015: 112), “Technology has the potential to restructure and transform the traditional curriculum and teaching methods, particularly the interaction with course material and delivery of associated sources”. Fortunately, a large number of these learning resources are available free of charge and the learners can easily have access on these educational resources at any time and any place they want.

Language learners with internet access have a great opportunity to use on line learning resources on their demand and they can learn anywhere and anytime they like. As (Song, Karimi, & Kim, 2015) demonstrate, mobile technologies easily provide such access even in underprivileged and distant areas of the world. Moradi (2017) mentions that “the independence of M-learning, its user friendly nature, accessibility at anytime and anywhere and handy nature, are amongst the significant features of mobiles that manifest their effectiveness and encourage learners to use them in the process of language learning”.

According to Song, Bonk, & Whiting (2012), a large number of learners probably like to use open and free online resources during their online learning experiences, like TED, MIT Open Course Ware Open College Textbooks and etc. The development of these online learning resources can have a crucial impact on the attitudes and beliefs regarding learning. Learners are able to learn from online resources everywhere, at any time and any place they like.

To be in line with Corrigan (2012), with the enhancement of information communication technologies (ICTs), learning resources and raising emphasis on autonomous learning in undergraduate and postgraduate education, an increasing need to revise the present academic syllabi and to incorporate items that support SDL is felt.

McLoughlin & Lee (2010) state that self-directed learners in order to establish their own knowledge may examine and manage their learning materials and as well learning process, reflect on their learning and evaluate it individually. The easy access of modern educational technologies and online resources strengthened and broadened the capacity for self-directed language learners to enhance their knowledge independently and to have a control over their learning process.

Nowadays, languages learners can easily participate in virtual schools or universities, they can sign up for open online language courses and learn from them, and they can access free educational materials and resources. They can enhance their knowledge and language skills by participating in virtual language classes, MOOCs, online academic communities and social media. They not only can individually learn a language through internet and using modern technologies, but also they are able to learn it in group with other language learners around the world. Therefore, modern educational technologies and online learning resources have a significant potential in supporting autonomous and self-directed learning. Greenhow et al. (2009), with concentrating on the features of Web 2.0, assert that educators and teachers need to consider students’ participatory facets and creative methods and procedures of online resources, for instance, creating learning materials such as blogs, podcasts, videocasts and sharing them with peers, and taking part in building knowledge through collaborative wiki practices.



According to McLoughlin & Lee (2010), the dynamic, participatory, social facets and process-based of learning through online resources can support people independency and self-directed learners.

During the past decades, major focus of most of the previous studies conducted on SDL was on the use of online resources; however, not many studies have been done to investigate the attitudes and motivational facets of language learners about online learning resources and environment.

Sridharan, Deng, Kirk, and Corbitt (2010) mention that the main factors which influence the effectiveness of learning through online resources include: a) technological facets b) management of the technology and learning resources c) material organizations. Dunlap & Lowenthal (2011) depict that recent technologies can help students to enhance their problem-solving skills and as well as their metacognitive capabilities. Moradi (2014) classified the key factors that can positively and negatively influence language teachers' use of technology in classroom in three categorizations, including a) personal factors b) institutional factors and c) technological factors.

Some studies have investigated effective factors of learning with the help online environments (e.g. Sridharan et al, 2010); some investigated the positive facets of modern technologies in learning (e.g. Greenhow et al., 2009); some studies focused on the factors influencing the adoption of technology in language education and the role of technology in development of language skills (Moradi, 2014; 2015, 2017). However, it is crucial to consider the learners' perspectives and perceptions about the use of modern technologies and online learning environment.

4. Integration of SDL in language learning-teaching processes

Recently, self-directed learning has been one of the major concerns among the researchers and linguists to find out whether the language learners involving in self-directed learning are really able to learn more effectively and if they have a better capacity in remembering of what they learn during a longer time period or not. This is certainly in addition to their ability to use their knowledge better than those students who just directly receive such knowledge and instruction from their teachers. The previous research asserts that self-directed learning has been effective with some positive outcomes in various facets including teaching, operation and the learner's lifestyle (Cloud, 1992; Kamneungpol, 1999).

In language teaching-learning (LTL) processes traditionally most of the decisions are made by the teachers. In other words, for example, teachers decide about how students can learn, to what extent they can continue learning, what is important to them and what is not, how they can understand and achieve the goals of lessons, learning process, language competence and etc. However, during active learning and with the help self-

directed learning, language learners can decide for themselves and they can freely make decisions about different aspect of their learning, as they have the main responsibility of their learning process in active learning. Therefore, students try to learn by their own purposeful attempts rather than simply follow the decisions made by their instructors. Hence, SDL involves the capability of making decision individually about what and to what extent one can learn, what are learning needs and objectives of learning process, how to accomplish learning tasks, how to implement appropriate and desired learning strategies and finally how learning outcomes should be assessed. A large number of online learning materials and resources can be used positively for SDL practices. There are plenty of possible progresses from using such kind of online learning resources. Nevertheless, there are few research that investigated language learners' motivational facets in SDL from online learning environments and online educational resources.

5. Conclusion

The development of SDL in language learning and teaching and acquiring necessary skills of SDL along with school-based teaching-learning strategies and processes can significantly motivate students to plan and make decisions for their learning activities and evaluate their own progress and that finally leads to the effective learning.

Although students may not necessarily know about how to manage and control their own learning process, they would be able to do so through effective training and by active engaging and participating in every stage of making goals, planning for them, diagnosing different learning approaches, recognizing learning demands and assessment of their progress. Self-assessment as one of the crucial components of SDL is very important, since it requires language learners to know themselves and their learning needs better when they think of their progress and knowledge and finally they will perceive the best ways of effective learning.

In this process learners may use cognitive perception and self-assessment, therefore it seems necessary to assist the learners and guide them to set learning objectives, planning and applying useful learning strategies, finally evaluation their own learning outcomes and progress.

Integrating SDL can act as a useful strategy for enhancing language skills and can be successfully used as a useful tool for motivating learners to engage themselves in learning activities both inside and outside of classroom, because they can take the responsibility for what lessons to take and what problems to solve in real life situations, they are able to choose, plan, manage and evaluate their learning activities which can be carried out at any place and any time. SDL gives the learners to have a greater role in their learning process. However, language teachers need to analyze and evaluate students' linguistic competence before integrating SDL strategy in order to get effective and better outcomes.

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