Towards a Practical Model of Self-Directed Learning in the Algerian Educational Planning

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to provide a tripartite practical model to improve students' potentialities for SDL.The data for the study were collected via standardized semi- structured questionnaire and interview. The findings revealed the participants positive attitudes towards a myriad of parameters of a successful SDL. Hence, this model is based upon these fundamentals: personal attributes, process, context, and the embodiment of Self Directed Learning Rating Scale (SDLRS) which is a yardstick to test the learners' levels, and the requisite skills for becoming independent and lifelong learners.

Key words: self-directed learning, personal attributes, process, context, Self Directed Learning Rating Scale.

ملخَـــص

إن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو إعطاء نموذج ثلاثي الأبعاد لتطوير قدرات المتعلم. وكانت هذه الدراسة مبنية على معطيات قائمة على الاستفسار والحوار، فالمخرجات بينت المواقف الايجابية نحو مجموعة من المعايير مثل: دور المكتسبات الذاتية، المنهجية، المحيط ، والتطبيق الفعلي للسلم التصنيفي للتعلم الذاتي الموجه الذي يعتبر مقياسا لاختبار مستوى ومهارات المتعلم .

الكلمات الذالة: التّعلم الذّاتي الموجّه، المكتسبات الذّاتية ، المنهجية والمحيط ، السّلم التّصنيفي للتّعلم الذّاتي الموجّه.

1. Introduction:

The rapidity of change, the continuous creation of knowledge, and an ever-widening access to information make self- directed learning (SDL) compulsory and necessary. SDL is highly collaborative and integrative in essence. It is collaborative between two actors; that is, learners who exercise a great deal of independence in setting learning goals and deciding what is worthwhile learning as well as how to approach it within a given framework, and teachers who scaffold learning strategies and trigger students to use them on their own. Further, it is integrative because it integrates two manifold arts: the art of learning, and the art of teaching. The former embraces self-management with self-monitoring whereas the latter denotes the teacher's ability to balance what learners want for themselves with what teachers want for learners; in other words, knowing when to support and when to push learners toward the threshold of change. Suffice it to say that the need for an effective SDL has become one oftheurgent priorities for policy makers in this case, Algeria, as an educational prerequisite mechanism par excellence for the 21st century.

2. The scope of the Study:

The purpose of the present study is to thrash out the essence of SDL. The chief scope is a tentative examination of the tripartite emerging emphases: personal attributes, context, process, and SDLRS to achieve fruitful and practical SDL route-map model in the Algerian Educational Planning.

3. The Significance of the Study:

This study will provide a valuableinput for students, teachers and policy-makers. It will enable students to grasp and implement a dynamic model of SDL. It is important also that teachers will be self directed learners themselves, and to become one of the best and probably the most influential role model for their students. Through this study, teachers will decide what they need to know and what to learn; set their own goals; identify and find resources for learning; and evaluate their own learning. All this skills must be developed in students. Although a student can become a self directed learner without explicit instruction of these traits, it is more likely to occur when tea-

chers and decision makers understand and foster them at the school level by committing time and resources to develop school environments that enable students to be self-directed learners.

4. The Research Question:

-How can we achieve a practical model of SDLin the Algerian Educational planning?

5. The Hypothesis formulated is:

The establishment of a practical model of SDL can be realized by the rehabilitation of personal attributes, process, context and the embodiment of SDLRS.

6. Background and Rationale of the Study:

The development of SDL skills has become one of the priorities of education in the last few decades. Research and scholarship in SDL have increased internationally, and new programmes, practices and resources for facilitating SDL have been introduced to help educators as well as learners. Knowles (1975) explained that self-directed learners are proactive and take the initiative in learning rather than passively waiting to be taught as reactive learners. Their learning is more meaningful and powerful, with greater motivation resulting in longer retention. They are more responsible in their own lives, having benefited from the self-disciplining process of their learning. According to Hiemstra (1994) and Brookfield (1986), SDL is a process in which learners are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning and are expected to work independently or with others, in order to achieve pre-set learning goals.

Various studies have reported that students initially experience anxiety and fear about SDL and express their need for formal instruction in the concept of the SDL process at the beginning of their courses (Mifflin et al 2000). Kell and Van Deursen (2002) expressed their view that it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that students acquire self-directed learning skills, which can be transmitted from education to their place of work. Both learners and educators process a clear concept of SDL and select the appro-

priate teaching-learning strategies to facilitate and enhance learners' abilities in becoming self directed in their learning process.

7. The Research Design:

The research design reflects the importance of issues involving SDL. This study aims to provide an empirical-based study on the main arenas to reach an expedient path in learning. In addition, the methodological wedding between quantitative and qualitative data serves as a tool to generate deep and interrelated conceptions, and contribute to provide a functional model of SDL. Thus, the two strategies of enquiry are: semi-structured questionnaire and interview. The former includes structured questions, and each respondent is to be exposed to the same questions and the same system of coding responses. The standardized questionnaire is divided into three parts: personal attributes, process, and context. The second research procedure is a semi-structured interview which refers to a prepared interview protocol that includes open ended questions. It serves to evince opinions about the validity and feasibility of SDLRS in the Algerian educational planning. The questionnaire and interview were administered to two categories of people: university teachers and students. Besides, the choice of the informants is based upon a non-probability purposive sampling that is to pick the nearest warm bodies that best meet the purposes of the study.

8. Data Analysis:

8.1. Attitudes towards Personal Attributes (i.e. motivation, self-efficacy, locus of control):

Question: do you think that personal attributes are vital ingredients for building SDL?

As far as the first question is concerned, the results obtained, as displayed in the bar-graph below, show that the majority of the respondents (83, 33%) agree that personal attributes are dynamic mechanisms and important criteria to achieve SDL. They argue that the learner that does not possess these dispositions will not be self-directed. Whereas the minority (16, 66) affirms that without peer or collective collaboration the many traits of a self-directed learner will be destructed.
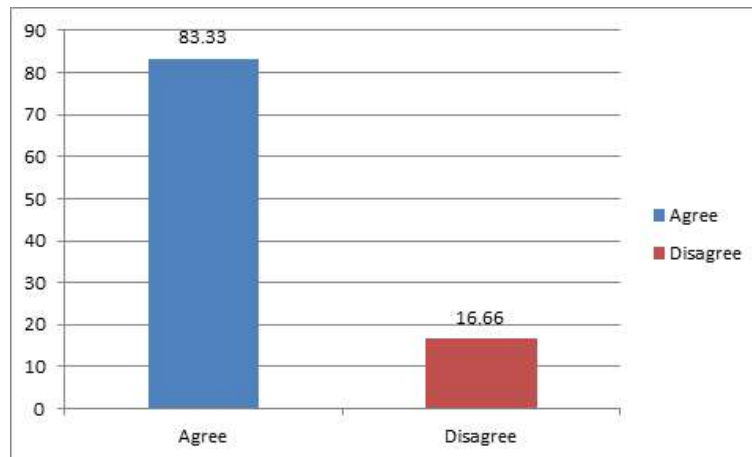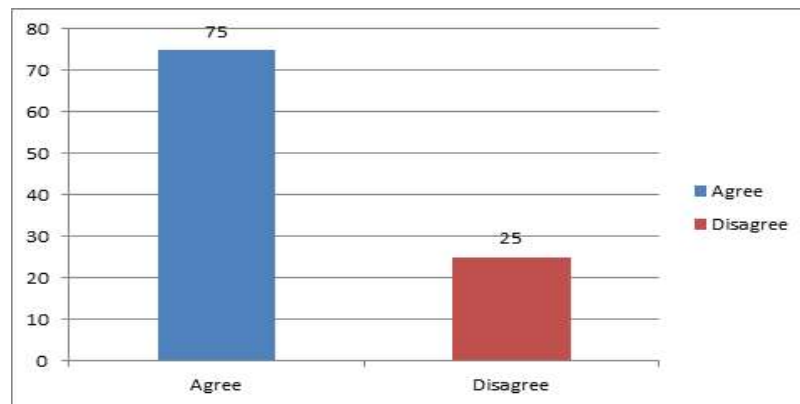
8.1. Bar Graph

8.2. Attitudes towards the Process of SDL (planning, implementing, evaluating):

Question: do you think that SDL is empowered by schematizing it under the umbrella terms: planning, implementing and evaluating?

(75%) of the participants show positive attitudes towards the process of SDL. They confirm that this process is the right path that help the learner attains his programmed goals. Other respondents (25%) do not grasp the meaning of the process; so they perceive it unnecessary and additional.
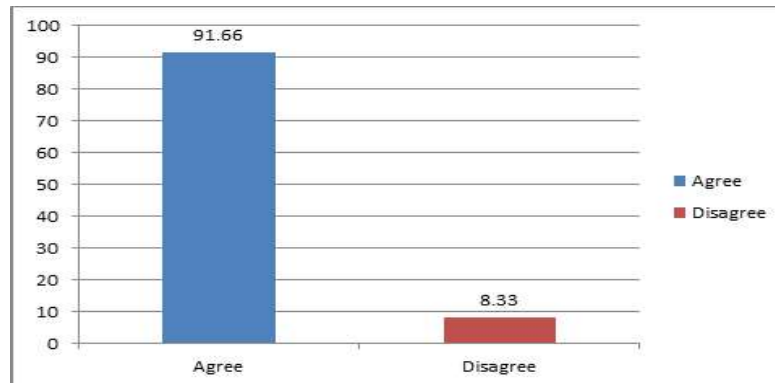
8.2. Bar Graph

8.3. Attitudes towards the Context:

Question: do you think that the learners' involvement in educational planning is a relevant technique to foster SDL?

The majority of the respondents show solid confirmation that their participation as active agents in educational planning, and the manipulation of a myriad of technological resources, the choice of the program, their contribution in curriculum design is a worthy parameter to be effective self-directed learners. Whereas other participants disagree because there is a rift between top-down and bottom-up context. Thus, fostering SDL is unattainable in Algeria.

8.3. Bar Graph

8.4. Teachers' Interview:

8.4.1. Attitudes towards the implementation of Self-Directed Learning Rating Scale (SDLRS)

Teachers affirm that the integration of SDLRSwithin educational planning, and its implementation is a valuable tool and a relevant method to assess students' preparedness for SDL. They ensure that it is a positive alternative to diagnose the learners' deficits and to design practical solutions. In addition, they show strong emphasis upon the five areas that are key elements for the rating scale. Again, they make a special reference to the areas tackled within the scale as complementary and sufficient to test students' standards as high, moderate or low. Students, while responding to the items of SDLRS will develop a clearer concept and understanding of self-directed learning beheviour, identify the areas of their own strength and weaknesses and select appropriate strategies to further their self-directed learning rating skills. Teachers also are convinced that they will be able to support students to make a conscious effort towards their self-improvement.

9. Synthesis, conclusions and recommendations:

9.1. Learning how to learn: Concepts' clarification and application:

The speed of change and the explosion of knowledge are requiring people to learn throughout their lives. This has important implications for the

role of the school, which is no longer providing a package of knowledge and skills to serve a person for life. The emphasis needs to be on the methodological path of learning; in other words, learning how to learn. The importance of the human factor as being central to education, economic competitiveness, and social advance has been reconsidered and needs to be reformed. To help students achieve the many characteristics of SDL, teachers, parents, students and administrators must understand the concepts of motivation, metacognition, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and locus of control and goal orientation. These concepts provide the foundation for students seeking to become a self-directed learner, and teachers have to clarify and foster them at the classroom or school level.

9.2. Self directed learning Process:

To start working towards the development of a successful self-directed learner, the role of the teacher is to first identify the student as having the potential to be self-directed, and as following the process of SDL that generally incorporates some basic steps:

First, the learner identifies learning needs, develops learning goals, prepares a learning plan, locates necessary resources, implements the learning plan, and evaluates the results and the process. However, there are many barriers that students may experience throughout the process. Thus, becoming a self-directed learner is a step-by-step process.

9.3. Self directed learning Context:

Many education programs provide a highly structured learning environment for their students. The teacher provides plans, resources, and knowledge. In this type of context, students view themselves as passive in their own learning process. Programs that support SDL enable students in taking responsibility for their own learning through collaborating with teachers to design a learning program that addresses their personal goals. Also, the curriculum has opportunities for student choice. Teachers should foster disciplined inquiry or scientific method through critical questioning, expressing different views and putting assertions and hypotheses. Further, several key issues and concerns leap to mind when speaking about the context of SDL. Context focuses on

environmental factors and how those factors impact the level of self direction provided to the learner. There are various factors in a learning context that can impact a learner's SDL experience. As the model illustrates, there are design elements and support elements. Design elements include the resources, structure and the nature of the tasks in the learning context. The support elements can come from the teacher's feedback or peer collaboration and communication (Brockett, 1991). The Algerian state should not view SDL as an add-on, but an integral part-and a desired outcome of theeducational system.

Diagram 9.3. A Conceptual Model for Understanding SDL (Brockett, 1991)
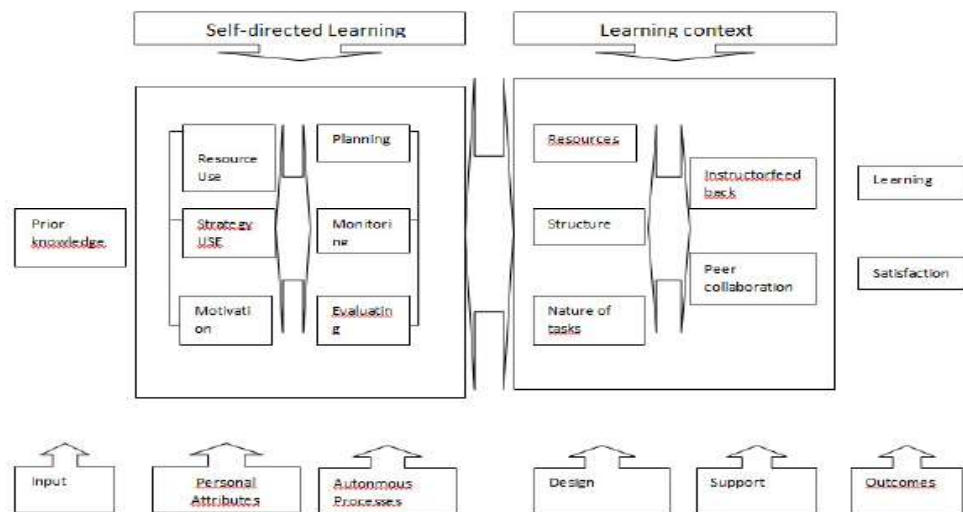
9.4. Self-Directed Learning Rating Scale in the Algerian Educational Planning:

In order to realize their full potential as learners, it is essential that students have good SDL skills. It is also important that students develop their own roles in learning by continuously monitoring their own learning progress, identifying areas of deficit and making constant efforts towards self-improvement. The integration of Self Directed Learning Rating Scale (SDLRS) in the Algerian educational planning will enhance the requisite skills for becoming independent and lifelong learners. It is important that both educators

and learners have a clear understanding of the concept and nature of SDL skills for its further development. Thus, the incorporation of SDLRS within the Algerian educational planning is a subservient instrument and a practical tool to measure the level of self-directedness in one's learning process. The use of this energetic model will benefit both learners and teachers. First, students responding to the SDLRS items will not only reveal their own levels of self-directedness in learning, but will also have the opportunity to develop an insight into SDL and a better understanding of the concept. Second, teachers, having identified learners' levels of self directedness and deficits in learning, will be better able to guide them from their position of learning dependence to independence. The SDLRS (Knowles, 1975) comprised of items categorized under five broad areas of SDL:

9.4.1. Areas of awareness:

Identification of learning needs- selection of the best method in learning- consideration of teachers as facilitators rather than providers of information- identification of areas of deficit- maintenance of self motivation- planning learning goals-keep up to date on different learning resources.

9.4.2. Areas of learning strategies:

Participation in group discussions- inter-active teaching learning sessions- arrangement of self-learning routine to develop a learning culture in life- concept mapping- simulation in teaching learning- learning from case studies.

9.4.3. Areas of learning activities:

Rehearse new lessons- concept mapping and outlining- the ability of using information technology- keeping annotated notes of all ideas, critical reflections, and analysis of new learning-exploring information beyond the course objectives- knowledge and practice- open mindedness towards others point of view.

9.4.4. Areas of evaluation:

Self-assessment before getting feedback from instructors-monitoring the learning progress- identification of areas of strength and weakness- ac-

ceptance of criticism- monitoring the accomplishment of learning goals- inspiration by others success.

9.4.5. Areas of interpersonal skills:

Interaction with others- making use of any opportunity- working in collaboration with others-expression of views freely-pursues learning in a culturally diverse milieu.

It can be said that the realization of SDL can be achieved via the rehabilitation of personal attributes, process, and context with the embodiment of SDLRS.

10. Conclusion:

To understand SDL from personal attributes and process perspective is important in that it provides information regarding how learners are different in terms of the level of self-direction as well as how learners take control in the learning process. Educational planning should acknowledge both individual and collective goals for learning with the diverse learning preferences of multicultural populations, and the effects of new technologies as the concept of SDL continues to evolve. Our educational planning has not travelled on a smooth road. The planning policy may look great on paper, but little can be achieved without an effective leadership, a clear vision, a common goal to strive for, and a network of support from teachers, students, parents, policy makers and the general public.

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