



## Readiness of Learners and Effectiveness of Web log in Self Directed Learning (SDL) to Foster Learner Autonomy

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### Abstract:

*The present research is an attempt to check the readiness of undergraduate students to use Self Directed Learning (SDL) as a method to learn English language. Further objective is to assess the effectiveness of weblog in promoting and fostering SDL strategies viz. Academic learning strategy, Social learning strategy, Active planning strategy and Affective strategy (Stern 1983). The ultimate aim of the study is to develop learner autonomy using weblog as a language learning tool.*

*A month long weblog program was planned and carried out with under graduate students who had IT and communication skills as course components in their academic curriculum. Data gathered through program was coded, correlated and analyzed through different qualitative and quantitative statistical methods. The outcome of the research showed that weblog could be an effective language learning tool to foster and promote learner autonomy.*

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**Keywords:** *Self directed learning readiness, Learner autonomy, Weblog*

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### 1. Introduction

"No matter how good teaching may be, each student must take the responsibility for his own education."

- John Carolus

"You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink". This cliché appeals to anyone who has tried to make a baby eat something he does not want, it is also apparent to teachers that you can expose a pupil to knowledge but he will not always learn- or he does not consistently learn what the teacher desires. Not only does the school or college present to the pupil an opportunity to learn, but even the worst kind of school or college cannot halt learning. Learning from out- of -formal education influences, and the learning of certain attitudes towards the formal education and its activities cannot be stopped. Learning is an everlasting phenomenon. As an adult learner, an individual undergoes learning through major three channels viz. formal, non- formal and informal.

According to famous American educationalist Pestalozzi the ultimate aim of any learning process is the progressive development of man's innate power. In fact, realization of power is the final destination of any learning process. A convergence model known as Self Directed Learning, jacketing progressive commonalities of formal, informal and non-formal education has come in the limelight in last two decades. Education/learning has undergone a massive change

throughout the last two centuries- from Banking Concept of Education to Problem Posing Education, “Teacher of the Student and Student of the Teacher” to “Teacher Student with Student Teacher”, “Subject (Master-teacher) to Object (Subordinate-Student) relationship” to “Egalitarian teacher-student relationship”, “Domestication of Education” to “Liberation of Education”, and from intransitive to transitive and critical consciousness. While glancing at the development trajectory of the education, a core element observed undergoing deep revision is a place of learners in the process of learning. Continues efforts are being made to revere learner’s autonomy in the process of learning. “Learner’s Autonomy” has become an unquestionable goal and integral part of teaching methodologies in the contemporary “learner centric” education literature. Huge amount of money is being pumped to promote and sponsor various tools and methods focused at enhancing “Learner’s Autonomy”. Self Directed Learning (SDL) is one of those tools with the cause to respect learner’s sovereignty. Self-directed learning is “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others,” to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles 1875). Stern (1983) identifies four basic sets of strategies which are exhibited by good language learners. He describes.

1. An active planning strategy,
2. An academic (explicit) learning strategy,
3. A social learning strategy and
4. An effective strategy.

In this research an attempt is being made to understand the readiness of learners and effectiveness of web log as a tool of Self Directed Learning to foster adult learner autonomy.

Scaling learners’ preparedness to use SDL as a method of learning, comprehending learners’ preparedness to use Web-log as a tool of SDL, Evaluating effectiveness of Web-Log in SDL to promote learner’s autonomy and comprehending the promotion in reciprocity of idea among the learners through the use of SDL are the core objectives of this research.

## **2. Methodology**

The research is divided in three main stages. First stage checks existing readiness of a samples using SDL readiness scale, the second stage contains the tryout of weblog program and the third stage surveys the improvement through weblog questionnaire.

### **2.1 Universe**

Students (Both male and Female), from selected colleges in S P University, having English and IT as essential components in their syllabus formed sample for the study.

### **2.2 Sampling Method**

Simple Random Sampling through Random Table was used for the purpose of selecting research samples.

### **2.3 Tools for Data Collection**

- 1 Subjective Inventory ( Guglielmenos Readiness Scale)
- 2 Web log programme
- 3 Questionnaire
- 4 Interview
- 5 Reflective reports
- 6 Observation diary

### 3. Procedure

The basic questionnaire for measuring preparedness of the samples to use self directed learning style as a language learner was a Readiness Scale. The Scale of Readiness of the learners to use self directed learning style had been adapted from Guglielmino's readiness scale which was originally made for nursing students. The original scale was altered concerning the need of the research topic that is application of self directed learning style in the field of language learning. Several questions were simplified as per the demand of topic, certain questions having to do only with nursing field were excluded from the list and several necessary questions were added to the list. A study on readiness of a language learner to use self directed learning was undertaken prior to actual implementation of weblog programme. The main aim of this study was to measure the readiness of the samples before they were exposed to weblog programme. Appropriate instructions were imprinted on the list and students were allotted adequate time to read the guidelines before they fill up required information. All the respondents were gathered and they were asked to fill up the questionnaire.

The readiness scale consists fifty questions to which students were instructed to respond on five-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree and never, seldom, sometimes, often, always. Questions one to twenty nine followed first pattern of response while questions thirty to fifty followed the second type of response. All the questions in readiness scale were close ended. All the respondents were advised to work at their own pace during filling the questionnaire. They were also informed that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in their responses. A weblog questionnaire was given to measure and note the change in the respondents after conduction of weblog programme.

### 4. The Weblog Programme

The weblog programme was begun on the basis of trial and error method for the purpose of flexibility. But later on finding respondents facing problems concerning language efficiency and lack of knowledge of blogs, they were divided into 12 groups having five members in each. The division of students into groups was done taking in consideration their HSC results and their prior knowledge of internet, weblog and language. An attempt was made to allot each group two students having good language proficiency, two students having knowledge of internet usage and weblog and a leader to manage the entire process. Later, it was decided that the learners would work in groups, though at the end of the project they would produce their individual blogs.

All the leaders of the groups gave a classroom demo of how to post an article on blog, how to visit others' blog and how to comment on them. Each student was asked to create a blog and publish at least one article. Students were given total freedom to choose the topic they like. Then after, they were instructed to visit one another's blogs to give feedback. Getting feedback, they were instructed to make necessary changes to improve their topic on a blog. I always tried to encourage the students and resolved their queries and doubts throughout the weblog programme. Students were also given additional information on blog and usage of internet and earning possibilities through internet.

The entire blog programme was carried out systematically. The creation of blogs follows a series of stepladder since the objective of the programme was to make learner more self dependence. Blog programme was carried out in following seven steps.

- 1 The learners were given demonstration on how to create blog as well as how to publish it.

- 2 The learners were asked to write an article on the topic they like and get it typed. They were also instructed to get their article checked by their group members and later on by me with a view to correct and improve their language and content.
- 3 The articles were given back to the students with extensive feedback and learners were requested to incorporate the necessary changes.
- 4 All the group leaders were instructed to create their blogs first so that they could be used as examples for other members.
- 5 Group leaders' blogs were examined by me. Group leaders were asked to help their group members creating their individual blogs.
- 6 The participants were encouraged to publish their own blogs and to visit each other's blogs to comment and share information. Here the focus was on the content of the articles.
- 7 The participants were asked to make necessary changes to improve the article by following the comments.

The main purpose of this research was to identify the preparedness of participants to use SDL language learning strategies. SDL readiness scale for a good language learner was employed for the same purpose. The basic idea was to identify the strategy in which students were weak to reach students' need to improve as a language learner. In the same way, the blog questionnaire was designed to gather information on the learners' experience of using blog as well as measure the effectiveness of using weblog to foster learner autonomy.

### **5. Analysis and Interpretation**

For statistical analysis of data gathered through SDL readiness scale and Blog questionnaire SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 14.0 was utilised. For the SDL readiness questionnaire the reliability analysis was carried out among the items and the alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was found to be satisfactory (0.892). The coefficient of 0.898 reported for these items is an estimate of the true alpha, which in turn is a lower bound for the true reliability. One of the probable reasons for the lower reliability coefficient could be that it is not designed on the readymade model. The weblog questionnaire was designed to measure the students' effective use of SDL strategies while using blog.

### **6. Reported Frequency of Self Directed Learning Strategies**

The standard deviation for the SDL readiness scale across four strategies viz. Active Planning strategy, Academic Learning strategy, Social Learning Strategy, academic learning strategy and affective strategy is reported 0.88 whereas average mean across the four strategies is reported 4.06. The reported standard deviation signifies that the alpha coefficient for reliability of the instrument across all the students positively correspondences with the availed average mean.

Data showed that 19.02%, 19.91%, 20.06% and 21.01 are readiness share of Social Learning, Active Learning, Academic Learning and Affective Strategy respectively of 80% preparedness of the respondents. Further, it explains that 5.09%, 4.94%, 5.98%, and 3.99% skill enhancement in Social, Active Planning, Academic Learning and Affective strategy respectively would help the respondent to be fully prepared/ready learner to use SDL.

The readiness of respondents (inclusive of all the four strategies viz. Social Planning, Active Planning, affective and academic learning) through converting the overall mean in percentage is 80%. Hence, every respondent is 80% ready to use various tools of SDL. However, around 20% skillfulness is still lacking among the respondent which is prohibiting them to be 100% ready to use SDL.

## 7. Weblog

In furtherance of Guglielmino's adapted likert scale to measure the readiness of students to use Self Directed learning, a tool in the form of weblog was selected and employed. The question and content of the previously used questionnaire was translated into a weblog.

Blogs carrying the characteristics of traditional diaries and journals and being one of the teaching and learning tools, presents brand new situation in which students are more able and willing to take charge of their own learning. 45% respondents had the experience of using blogs before the programme, while 55 % had never come across this sort of online tasks.

45 respondents had meager sort of experience of blog, however, by the end of the program 91.66 % respondents reported to have satisfactory experience, out of which 30 % said that they had good experience of blog while 61.66 % students said that they had very good experience working on blog. Improvement has been marked in terms of blog use amongst the groups, non experienced and those who had previous blog experience.

## 8. Reported Frequency of Self Directed Learning Strategies in Weblog

The standard deviation for the SDL readiness scale across four strategies viz. Active Planning strategy, Academic Learning strategy, Social Learning Strategy and affective strategy while using weblog is reported 0.73 whereas average mean across the four strategies is reported 4.23. The reported standard deviation signifies that the alpha coefficient for reliability of the instrument across all the respondents positively correspondences with the availed average mean.

After the weblog questionnaire it was found that respondents more ready and prepared with affective strategies in comparison to academic learning strategies and active learning strategies and social learning strategy to undertake Self Directed Learning. The social learning strategy with the mean 4.07 manifests that respondents are least ready with social learning strategy. Ability to work in new learning environment, ability to learn through observation, acceptance of feedbacks from peers are some of the important social learning strategies to which respondents have shown weak response. However, it is important to note that there is substantial increase in the mean of the Social Learning Strategies compare to pre weblog questionnaire. The mean in social learning strategy is swollen from 3.83 to 4.07 which is significant improvement and positively correlate to learners' autonomy and independence in the process of learning.

Post to the weblog program the readiness of respondents (inclusive of all the four strategies viz. Social Planning, Active Planning, affective and academic learning) through converting the overall mean in percentage was 85%. Hence, every respondent is 85% ready to use various tools of SDL. However, around 15% skillfulness is still lacking among the respondent which is prohibiting them to be 100% ready to use SDL. Still the efforts made to equip the respondents with essential skills across four strategies and to feel the gap of 15 %, the respondents would become 100% ready to use various tool of self directed learning.

It is very important to study the changes that have taken place in respondents answer from pre to post blog questionnaire. The changes that have been observed are positive in nature and correlate with learner's autonomy in the process of learning. There was an average 0.20 increase in the mean form pre to post blog questionnaire. This gives evident to the fact that respondents are inclined and more positive towards using SDL tools than conventional close room setting where in teacher- student relation is strictly defined and oppressive in nature.

The mean of Active Planning Strategy, Academic Learning Strategy, Social Learning Strategy, and Affective Strategy is correspondingly increased from 4.01, 4.04, 3.83, 4.23 to 4.23, 4.20, 4.07, 4.42 from pre blog to post blog questionnaire. It is also very important to note that there is not a single strategy where in change is negative and more importantly the mean of social learning strategy which was 3.83 has increased to 4.07. The social learning strategy which is a key to learner's autonomy and one's ability to take charge of his/her own learning has shown a very positive transformation. Furthermore, standard deviation during the pre blog phase which was 0.89 (average) decreased to 0.73 which is again positive. Decreased standard Deviation signifies that on a Likert Scale there is lesser variance in respondent's answers.

### 9. Outcome of the Study

The research on "Readiness of Learner and Effective of Weblog to Foster Learner Autonomy" has led to following findings.

- 1 The responsive/absorption capacity (readiness) of the learners to use SDL as a method of learning is extremely high.
- 2 Web-log as a tool of SDL has helped the respondents to enhance their latent SDL strategies/skills.
- 3 Repeated use of various SDL tools would enhance learner's autonomy and control over their learning process.
- 4 Blogging can be effectively used to advance independence in group learning.
- 5 Notwithstanding the traditional learning method, Blog can provide learners new learning environment.
- 6 Blog as a tool of SDL can foster skills like observation skills, ability to work in new learning environment, sense of belongingness and affection to learning group, ability work in integration and accept feedback non-defensively which are key to Social Learning Strategy.
- 7 Blog can help the learner to organise and plan their own learning and be independent in their learning process.
- 8 Conscious use of language learning helps learners in application of their learning potential in context beyond the classroom.
- 9 Blog makes the teacher to act as facilitator in the process of learning and thus helps in removing of Master- Subordinate relationship.
- 10 Blogs can be effectively used in language learning in General and English in particular.
- 11 Blog assisted language learning promotes collaboration by supporting students to overcome the cemetery of ignorance and allow them to learn from each other and creates mutual understanding.

### 10. Conclusion

The idea of using Weblog as a tool of SDL is useful to hold the interest of the learners in the learning process while respective the learner's autonomy. The role of teacher as a facilitator in the process of learning is very important since student's share intimate ties with teachers and is consistently engaged in the process of knowledge sharing. Awareness of their own readiness to use available SDL tools can create confidence in them to go through the learning process successfully.

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