Situational challenges of open distance students: A case for the development of self-directed learning skills

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Aim of the paper

To highlight the significance of being a self-directed learner in ODL environment

Reflect on challenges faced by students and how to proactively adapt teaching strategies to offer motivational and academic support to less self-directed students

Research questions

- (1) Why is self-directed learning important in open distance learning?
- (2) What situational challenges do South African ODL students experience that can cause lower self-direction and underachievement? and
- (3) What pedagogical strategies are recommended in literature to enhance ODL students' self-directed learning skills to empower them to overcome some academic challenges?

Problem

- Transition to higher education

- Students being ill-prepared to manage the transition from controlled, teacher-driven school learning environments to self-directed learning, as required in higher education

- Students who are unable to cope with the cognitive, organisational, and emotional skills demands that are required in ODL have trouble with performing academically (Simpson, 2012)

Problem

Students who are unable to cope with the cognitive, organisational, and emotional skills demands of ODL

High failure rates and dropout at higher education institutions

The pedagogical support and responsibility for developing students' self-directed learning skills are complex and contested by many higher education instructors

Self-directed learning

Self-directedness refers to students being in control of their studies and applying self-regulated and metacognitive processes such as planning, goal setting, task analysis, monitoring, and evaluation and reflection of their own progress during the execution of learning tasks (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008)

Self-directed learning

Knowles (1975)

"In its broadest meaning, SDL 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 resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes"

ODL and SDL

ODL and SDL requires:

• students that able to manage their time,

• to work both independently and with others,

• to persist, and to manage personal stress and motivation for the task at hand

• students should also be able to overcome the barriers presented by non-mother tongue education, to seek information from different sources, and to create a positive learning environment for optimum study

SDL and ODL

Developing self-directed learning in order to cope with ODL can therefore be seen as the metaphorical two sides of the same coin, as the same skills that students require to cope with academic, financial, administrative, and motivational challenges in ODL are also required to develop as a self-directed person.

SDL and ODL

Erroneously assume all students are self-directed

Hassel and Ridout (2018) report that higher education instructors support the necessity to develop students' self-directed learning skills; however, they lay emphasis on the active roles students themselves should play in taking full responsibility for their own academic success and monitoring their progress towards completing their qualifications

Situational challenges students face

Different levels, namely situational, attitudinal, psychological, and pedagogical levels

Poor time management in integrating the demands of studies with family, work, and social commitments;

Difficulty coping with personal stress

Relying on lecturer instruction and passive memorisation as a study skill
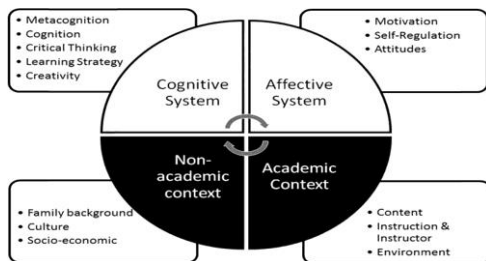
Situational challenges students face

• Deficient information technology skills

• Students from disadvantaged schools and communities, who lack knowledge and practice in using a library and e-learning tools because of limited access to resources such as libraries and computers, find it difficult to cope with the technological requirements of ODL

• Students' gender, race, and age regarding their selfdirectedness

• Geographically distant from their instructors and tutors, they are constantly burdened with study problems and need encouragement to meet their learning needs

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT AND ENHANCE STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

• **Strategy 1: Needs Analysis**
• **Strategy 2: Teaching and Learning Environment**
• **Strategy 3: Agency**
• **Strategy 4: Modelling of Self-Directed Behaviour**
• **Strategy 5: Assignments and Activities**
• **Strategy 6: Resources and Help-Seeking Skills**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT AND ENHANCE STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

• **Strategy 7: Time Management**
• **Strategy 8: Assessment**
• **Strategy 9: Feedback**
• **Strategy 10: Reflection**
• **Strategy 11: Collaboration and Communication**
• **Strategy 12: English Proficiency**

THANK YOU

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