Book Review

Emerging Self-Directed Learning Strategies in the Digital Age

Reviewed by Pei-Di Shen, Institute of General Education, Ming Chuan University, Taipei, Taiwan

Reviewed by Chia-Wen Tsai, Department of Information Management, Ming Chuan University, Taipei, Taiwan

Reviewed by Lynne Cheng Hsu, Institute of General Education, Ming Chuan University, Taipei, Taiwan

The book opens by a discussion anchored in self-directed learning as a necessity for success in online learning. In the course of the discussion, readers are given a brief outline of the advantages and challenges of distance education. Convenience and flexibility are identified as the main advantages of distance education. The authors point to lack of physical interaction; neglect of different individual learning styles and a decreased sense of community as most notable among the disadvantages. Possible solutions are offered for instructors to address the challenges of distance education and help students develop much-needed self-direction capabilities. Among the solutions offered are: adjusting course organization and layout, strategies for maintaining more frequent interaction; methods for creating a sense of community and chunking the content in ways that assist the learner to pace and navigate through content more effectively.

The question of how academic performance can be monitored in SDL by using technology is examined in the second chapter. To facilitate this, a mobile-based Grade Point Average (GPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) computation and analysis system, called Grade Point Average Monitor (GPAM), has been developed by the researchers. Students who want to measure their performance during the learning process can utilize this tool to maintain a list of registered courses, compute GPA and CGPA, predict a target CGPA based on current CGPA. This application is tested for storing, maintaining, analyzing and predicting results for users and could be used as a guide to SDL. Detailed features and functionalities with interface images from this application are presented as proof of its effectiveness.

In response to the fact that there is not enough attention dedicated to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and the issue of how to incorporate MOOCs in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector of developing countries,

the authors of chapter 3 seek to cover all aspects of the current situation. They outline general features and benefits of MOOCs platform, present possible implementations using MOOCs, and identify difficulties as well as challenges in the TVET sector for integrating MOOCs. Finally, they provide suggestions for both instructors and TVET stakeholders for formulating policies in relation to MOOCs.

Chapter 4 presents a review of scholarly literature on adult learning theory and non-mandatory training participation, wherein the author specifically emphasizes linking adult learning theory assumptions with the non-mandatory training participation intention of employees. In conclusion, if the six assumptions of adult learning theory can be properly met, adults' intention to participate in non-mandatory training will be stimulated. As for the organizational perspective, if organizations adopt adult learning theory and encourage employees to identify their own training needs, this will reduce the training costs of the organization.

The fifth chapter describes a series of struggles which adult students face while constructing their dissertations. Two studies are referenced in this chapter, conducted at the same university, regarding the effectiveness of a ten-year-old doctoral program. The author applies andragogy theory, which comprises six assumptions and eight processes about adult learners and what they require to be successful, to improve doctoral dissertation completion. Problems in the process, such as approval of the study design and the lack of instruction in APA style writing are identified; suggestions are then proposed to solve the issues. The author also points out the limitations of these studies, such as the results might not apply to other institutions with different students or with other writing style standards.

Traditionally, teachers are rather dominant in the language learning process; therefore, the authors of chapter 6 examine the teacher role as a shift from controller to advisor in SDL, and introduce the subject of cultural influence. Learner autonomy is a key characteristic of western education, and yet this is not the case in Chinese culture. Chinese students respect authority, are afraid of being wrong and losing face, and are uncomfortable when speaking out or criticizing others. The authors suggest teachers could provide different kinds of strategies for students, and create supportive environments with relevant tasks which account for cultural norms and expectations to promote learners' language proficiency and self-direction.

Chapter 7 focuses on metacognition, its relationship to cognition, its role in knowledge transfer, its implementation in critical thinking, and use of strategies in SDL. The authors review recent research and conclude that metacognition must be present for knowledge transfer to occur. In other words, metacognition, as the key to deeper and durable learning, facilitates students to monitor and regulate themselves in an SDL environment. Based on this, the authors give suggestions for instructors about strategies to engage students in metacognitive learning, such as problem-based and process-oriented learning, as well as activating teaching techniques.

In the final chapter, the author presents a case study of teachers' professional development through essential questions. The program specifically targets critical thinking, and uses digitally-based SDL strategies such as forums and discussion boards. Teacher pedagogy was found to be transformed after SDL and there were statistically significant gains in student achievement scores. Teachers' questioning skills grew significantly during the process in terms of the use of essential questions, classroom redesign, and teacher attitude towards SDL.

In general, the book covers not only SDL-related scholarly literature but also implementations of digital tools in today's world. A noteworthy aspect of the book is that the authors discuss the various circumstances which SDL learners and educators face in different countries or cultures. Such a cross-cultural perspective contributes to the diversity of this book and adds significantly to the merit of the publication. The case studies provided successfully demonstrate the current and future SDL skills and strategies needed in the digital world. The book would be more comprehensive if it included real case studies of SDL in business world from the company's perspective, and if research about learners' strategies other in settings other than formal school settings were also included.

Emerging Self-Directed Learning Strategies in the Digital Age
Frank G. Giuseffi
© 2017 by IGI Global
257 pp.
$132.00
ISBN 9781522534655

REFERENCES

Chyr, W. L., Shen, P. D., Chiang, Y. C., Lin, J. B., & Tsai, C. W. (2017). Exploring the effects of online academic help-seeking and flipped learning on improving students' learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, *20*(3), 11–23.

Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning*. New York, NY: Association Press.