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# PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SELF DIRECTED LEARNING AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

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**Abstract**

The current study intended to find out the undergraduate student perceptions regarding self-directed learning practices at university level. The study was quantitative in nature. Data was collected from five hundred students of four different universities of district Lahore by using a simple random sampling technique. A self-constructed and validated survey tool was used to collect information from the study participants. The data was analyzed by using Descriptive and inferential statistic. The results reported a statistically significant difference in perceptions and experiences of students from social & natural science. A significant difference was observed among male and female student's perception regarding self-directed learning. Students of highest semester found more self-directed learning than the junior semesters. It is suggested that seminars and training need to be held for students in order to familiarize them with self-directed learning and develop confidence among them.



**Keywords**
Self-directed Learning, Undergraduate Students, Learning Experiences

## 1. Introduction

Individuals with clear goals who take the initiative and stay open to learning are self-directed learners. In addition, self-directed learners are self-motivated, self-assured, and self-controlled. These qualities are essential for staying up-to-date in today's rapidly growing information age. People who can direct their learning know how to access information, think critically, and organize their learning effectively. This ability to learn serves individuals well in their personal and professional lives beyond university. They are driven to study. Remain willing to continue studying, and actively

pursue it throughout their lives. As a result, identifying self-directed learning skills is critical for university students (Morris, 2019). Self-directed learning allows students to make their own decisions about the what, why, how, and where of their education (Hill *et.al*, 2020). Developing abilities to study on one's own enables pupils to practice autonomous learning while acquiring essential skills. By designing their course plans and learning objectives, learners are better competent to determine their individual educational needs and develop critical thinking, problem-solving ability, creativity, accountability, perseverance, and discipline (Hall, 2021). In essence, Self-Directed Learning encompasses the procedure by which individuals take the initiative, either with or without external aid, to assess their learning needs and set learning objectives, identify suitable human and material resources for learning, select, and implementation of appropriate learning methodologies, and assessment of learning outcomes (Loeng, 2020). In the contemporary era, there is an increasing demand for students to adopt a lifelong learning approach in both their academic choices and professional careers. Within higher education, a strong emphasis is placed on fostering direct learning, which can be achieved through collaborative efforts during the learning and working process (Boyer *et al*; 2014). Self-directed learning (SDL) holds significant advantages for students, enabling them to simultaneously pursue work and studies. Depending on why a person chooses to participate in learning, self-directed learning has been divided into three types. These include those who are goal-oriented, or participate in order to accomplish their goals, those who are activity-oriented, or join in order to make friends and have fun, and those who are learning-oriented, or see learning as the main element required to improve one's life (Butcher & Sumner, 2011). Individuals who have mastered the art of self-directed learning possess various advantageous traits, including the ability to organize their learning effectively, apply new knowledge to broader overcome circumstances and obstacles, & remain open to new experiences and changes. Self-confidence and self-awareness, a motivation to learn, skill in applying multiple learning strategies, and a deep grasp of their studies styles, are passions and abilities all characteristics of such persons Rawson (2022), Tekkol (2018), Qadri and Pasha (2021), and Quartey *et al*; (2008). Self-directed Learning has been a widely adopted and effective approach for skill development in students, allowing them to remain true to their interests, strengths, and talents. Self-directed learning fosters motivation and nurtures essential social, collaborative, management, and research skills by empowering students to take charge of their learning process. This instructional style allows pupils to create and meet their objectives and timeframes instilling a feeling of effective management and decision-making. Self-directed learning (SDL) refers to recognizing one's knowledge requirements, and strategies for acquiring that knowledge and judging one's learning progress. This method assumes that learners actively select appropriate learning tasks that meet their specific learning needs (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008). Self-directed learning has

historical roots extending back to the time of the Greeks. Self-directed learning was practiced by famous Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. During that era, formal educational institutions were not yet established. Consequently, scholars of that time independently engaged in self-directed learning about 150 years ago. In the year 1840, Craik embraced the practice of self-education and also established meaningful connections with various individuals. Subsequently, in 1859, Smiles authored a book titled "Self Help," which extols the value of learners' self-directed efforts in their personal development. For certain students, the process of learning and applying knowledge might present challenges, particularly when the method of delivering the content lacks engagement, fails to pique their interest, or becomes excessively rigid in structure. Among the earliest and most comprehensive approaches to disseminating information, self-directed or student-directed learning empowers learners to engage actively in a manner that facilitates comprehension of the content, making it more accessible and manageable, while effectively acquiring the necessary knowledge.

Four aspects of self-directed learning are revealed by the research literature:

- Self-regulated learning the ability to organize, direct, and control one's emotions, ideas, and behaviors while engaging in a learning process is known as self-regulation. The most popular self-regulation model consists of four stages: (a) setting learning goals, (b) monitoring and regulating the learning progress, (c) making changes, or altering techniques, to achieve goals, and (d) reflecting on the task to produce new knowledge (Adinda, & Mohib2020). Executive functioning, such as working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility, as well as metacognition, self-monitoring, grit/perseverance, discipline/self-control, and self-reinforcement, are traits of self-regulation. Self-evaluation, which stands for self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control, is also included in self-regulation (Gureckis & Markant, 2012).
- Motivation is the desire to engage in an activity that arises from the inherent enjoyment of an activity or a sense of duty to engage in a task (Zhu *et al*. 2020). The belief that intelligence, personality, and abilities are adaptable and dynamic, moulded by experience, and developing over the course of a person's life, is a fundamental determinant of intrinsic motivation. Curious, open-minded, and persistent learners are more likely to have a growth mindset (Brandt, 2020).
- Personal Responsibility sometimes referred to as responsibility, initiative, and ownership, is the readiness to accept complete accountability for one's deeds. Students who take personal responsibility for their actions behave honorably and in accordance with established moral standards (An *et al*. 2020). Personal responsibility results from an innate desire to take actions that are advantageous to oneself, one's immediate environment, and society as a whole. The social context in which learning takes place has an irrevocable impact

on the continuum of personal responsibility development (Banz, 2009).

- Autonomy: The capacity for autonomy is the capacity to be aware of options, take command of one's education, and manage choices through continuous introspection and assessment. Being aware of one's surroundings and social dynamics is necessary for acting independently rather than doing so in social isolation. As they interact with their surroundings and other people, autonomous learners take charge of their life and forge a unique sense of self (Bidokht, 2011). Learning to create goals, plan lessons, choose resources and learning methodologies, as well as to monitor and assess progress, all require autonomy (Reinders, 2020).

### *1.1 Difference between self-regulated learning & self-directed learning*

Self-regulated learning is an active process where the learner attains and satisfies the desire to be independent in their learning. They set learning goals, monitor their goals, regulate their cognition, motivation and behaviour towards achieving their set goals (Pintrich, 2000; Saks, 2014). Whereas as self-directed learning is a characteristic of discipline by the learner where no instructor or facilitator is present and the learner takes the initiative to identify their learning needs, create learning goals, gather resources while choosing the appropriate strategies to achieve their set goals. Finally, they evaluate their learning outcomes (Saks & Leijen, 2014). In SDL the learner has the freedom to create their goals, and the manner in which to achieve them.

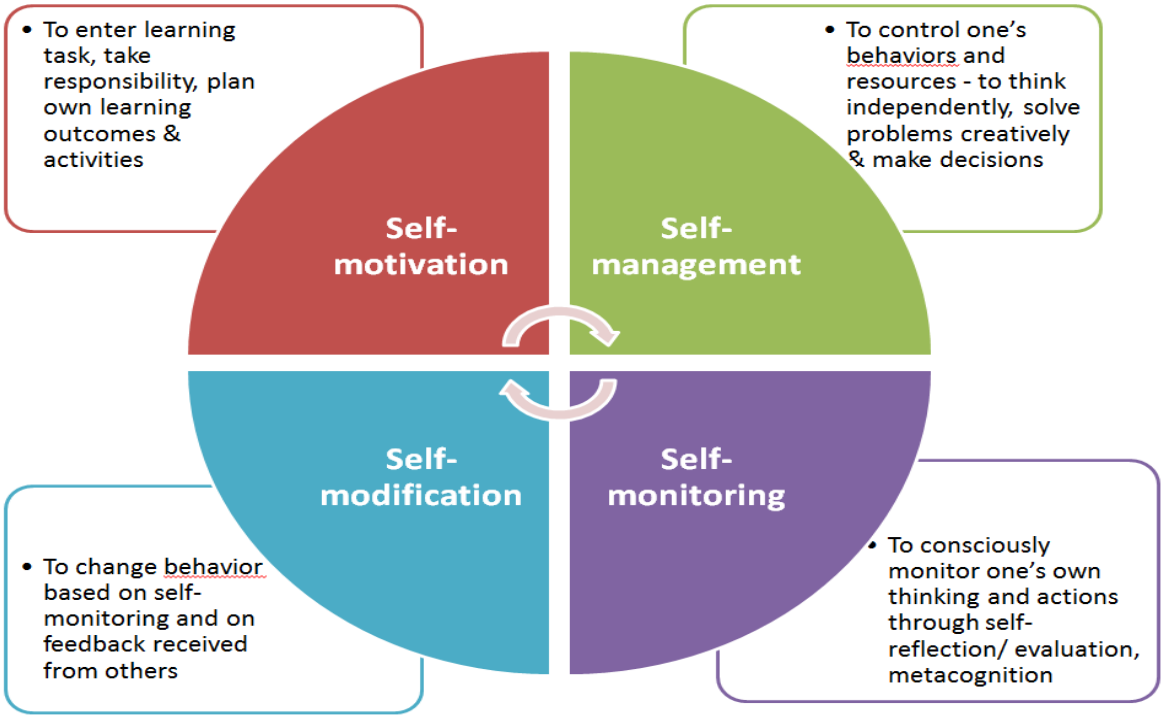


**Figure 1:** Self-directed vs self-Regulated learning

### *1.2 Self-directed VS self-Regulated chart*

Self-directed learning is when individuals take primary responsibility for developing, advancing, and evaluating their learning endeavors (Giddings, 2015). The onus of obtaining knowledge shifts from an external authority figure, such as a teacher, to the individual student in the self-directed learning setting. The learner's control and active participation in the learning process are essential to this strategy (Boyer & Usinger, 2015). Self-directed learning encompasses the process wherein learners take charge of conceptualizing, designing, implementing, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Brookfield, 2009). It can be described as an approach to organizing learning in which learners assume control over the learning process itself. Furthermore, self-directed learning can be perceived as an objective that learners aim to attain. In pursuit of this goal, individuals assume accountability for their learning endeavors and embrace personal autonomy and preferences (Kaufman, 2003). Self-directed learning is an instructional or learning approach whereby students, under the guidance of a teacher or mentor, actively participate in determining the content and delivery of educational material. By taking ownership and assuming responsibility for their studies, students select experiences that align with their interests, whether through hands-on experiences or lecture-based instruction. This process fosters a more organic and meaningful understanding of the subject matter. The theory of student-directed learning can be implemented both individually and in group settings, with the core premise emphasizing students' autonomy in shaping their educational journey and acknowledging the significance of topics based on their interests (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018). Student-directed learning fosters the utilization of a student's readiness to learn, enabling educators to actively involve their students in the learning experience. For instance, a teacher might pursue a broader learning objective within a research project, affording students the liberty to select their topics and conduct independent research. In this scenario, one student might delve into the historical aspects of the subject, while another may focus on its significance or practical implications. In this context, students are required to exhibit a specific skill, yet they are granted autonomy in determining the ultimate presentation format of their project. While seeking guidance from the teacher regarding the project's scope, students also have the opportunity to negotiate deadlines, which they must subsequently meet through the utilization of their abilities and strengths. In recent years, the methods of acquiring and utilizing information have undergone significant transformations, mainly due to its widespread accessibility through various sources. Consequently, these changes have posed challenges to the traditional notion that information remains immutable and to the belief in the infallibility of authorities who possess absolute and accurate information. Furthermore, the perspective of learning as mere memorization of isolated information has evolved into a problem-oriented approach, centered on the processes of conceptualization, comprehension, and knowledge

acquisition (Jarernvongrayap & Sitsira, 2006). In recent years, self-directed learning has grown in importance in education. Academic self-concept is critical to student development and encourages good academic performance. It also impacts their future achievements and goals. The main purpose of this research to look into how students view self-directed learning and how they practice toward their studies. The success of self-directed learning (SDL) relies on two main factors: the teaching strategies employed by the teachers and the learners' self-motivation. Another term often used interchangeably with SDL is "self-regulated learning" (SRL). This slight shift in terminology refers to an engaged and constructive approach where learners actively set learning objectives.

### *1.3 Objectives of the Study:*

The objectives of the study are as under:

- To find out the undergraduate student perceptions' regarding self-directed learning experiences.
- To examine the influence of demographic variables (age, gender, semester, & discipline) on undergraduate students' self-directed learning practices.

### *1.4 Significance of the Study:*

The research on undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of self-directed learning is essential for improving educational practices, fostering essential skills, and enhancing student engagement and motivation. It provides valuable insights that can benefit both current educational experiences and lifelong learning outcomes.

### *1.5 Research Design*

This study was quantitative in nature. The quantitative method was used to examine the student's perception regarding self-directed learning practices. A survey was conducted to gather relevant information related to self-directed learning (SDL) and its practices at the undergraduate level by using SDL survey tool.

### *1.6 Study Population:*

All undergraduate students from public & private Universities of District Lahore were considered as the population of the current study.

### *1.7 Sample and Sampling Technique:*

Five hundred undergraduate students from four universities (two public & two private) were selected as samples of the current study by using purposive sampling technique. The proposed sample was selected from different disciplines as social science & natural science department.

### *1.8 Description of Tool:*

A self-constructed survey questionnaire was used to collect data from undergraduate students (after ensuring the validity & reliability of the tool).

### *1.9 Data Analysis:*

#### 1.9.1. Descriptive Statistics

The data was analyzed by using SPSS software. In this study, descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviations).

#### 1.9.2. Inferential Statistics

One-way ANOVA, and the T-test was used. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to investigate the variations in perspectives and experiences of self-directed learning across four different universities.

**Table 1:** Age wise analysis of Self-directed Learning Practices

| **Age** | **ANOVA** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **Mean** | **St.D** | **Sig.** | **F** | **Difference** |
| Overall | 500 | 112.1 | 21.6 | .000 | 37.434 | 25-30>21-24> less than 20 |
| Less than 20 | 24 | 116.2 | 18.4 | | | |
| 21-24 years | 306 | 99.0 | 31.7 | | | |
| 25-30 years | 168 | 118.9 | 7.04 | | | |

The findings revealed a statistically significant difference in the different age groups practices regarding self-directed learning among undergraduate students, with a value of F (37.434). The Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test in comparing the means different of age groups, as 21-24 years (M=99.0, SD=31.7) displayed a significantly higher mean than the age group of less than 20 years (M=116.2, SD=18.4) and the age group of 25-30 years (M=118.9, SD=7.04). The overall age difference in self-directed learning practices is (Mean=112.1, SD=21.6).

**Table 2:** Semester wise self-directed learning Practices

| **Semester** | **ANOVA** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **Mean** | **St.D** | **Sig.** | **F** | **Difference** |
| Overall | 500 | 112.1 | 21.6 | .000 | 171.17 | 1>4>7>3&5>8>2>1 |
| One | 2 | 118.0 | .000 | | | |
| Two | 34 | 106.7 | 11.7 | | | |
| Three | 50 | 118.6 | 4.67 | | | |
| Four | 114 | 113.3 | 16.9 | | | |
| Five | 50 | 120.2 | 6.82 | | | |
| Six | 116 | 119.0 | 4.38 | | | |
| Seven | 94 | 121.8 | 7.62 | | | |
| Eight | 40 | 51.8 | 22.7 | | | |

Table 2 presented the statistically significant difference in the results. The study revealed a statistically significant difference in semester wise self-directed learning Practices, as indicated by the computed value of F (171.17). The analysis conducted through Tukey HSD demonstrated significant variations between the overall semester difference in of self-directed learning Practices (Mean=112.1, SD=21.6).

**Table 3:** Undergraduate student's Gender wise self-directed learning practices

| **Gender** | | | | | | **Sig. (2-tailed)** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **M** | **SD** | **t** | **Df** | | **Difference** |
| Male | 230 | 124.9 | 6.97 | 5.18 | 496 | .000 | F>M |
| Female | 270 | 110.2 | 22.52 | | | | |

Table: 3 presented results performed using an independent sample t-test to examine the male and female undergraduate student's self-directed learning Practices, revealing a notable difference (t = 5.18, df = 496, Sig. 2-tailed = .000) in the mean scores for males (M = 124.9, SD = 6.97) and females (M = 110.2, SD = 22.52). The significance value of .000 indicates that the differences observed between males and females undergraduate student's self-directed learning practices.

**Table No.4:** Discipline wise analysis of students' experiences regarding self-directed learning

| **Discipline** | | | | | | **Sig. (2-tailed)** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **M** | **SD** | **T** | **Df** | | **Difference** |
| Natural Science | 322 | 119.7 | 11.0 | 6.03 | 496 | .000 | N>S |
| Social Science | 176 | 107.9 | 24.8 | | | | |

Table 4, presented Discipline wise analysis of undergraduate students' experiences regarding self-directed learning practices. The study revealed a significant differences (t = 6.03, df = 496, Sig. 2-tailed = .000) in the mean scores for students' perceptions from different discipline (social sciences & Natural sciences), as Natural Science (M = 119.7, SD = 11.0) and Social Science (M =107.9, SD = 24.8) de. The significance value of .000 indicated that statistically significant difference was found in the perceptions of natural and social science undergraduate student's experiences regarding self-directed learning.

**Table 5:** Highly Perceived Means of Undergraduate Students perceptions regarding Self Directed Learning Experiences

| Item No. | Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **SD** | **D** | **N** | **A** | **SA** | **Mean** | **St. D** |
| 1. | I make an effort to learn the meaning of new words, I encounter. | 00 | 38 | 18 | 74 | 370 | 4.55 | .881 |
| 2. | I am willing to accept advice from others. | 40 | 10 | 18 | 118 | 314 | 4.31 | 1.17 |
| 3. | Once I start to work on a task, I keep working until it's done to my satisfaction. | 38 | 10 | 88 | 102 | 260 | 4.24 | 2.85 |
| 4. | I read texts several times to find the main ideas. | 36 | 04 | 30 | 184 | 264 | 4.20 | 1.09 |
| 5. | When I want to improve my academic Performance, I make some decisions and stick to them until I reach the goal. | 00 | 38 | 46 | 198 | 218 | 4.19 | .893 |

Table 5 presented the highly reported perceptions regarding self-directed learning experiences. The first high mean agreed statement by undergraduate students is "I make an effort to learn the meaning of new words I encounter" (M = 4.55, SD = .881). The second highest agreed statement is "I am willing to accept advice from others" (M = 4.31, SD = 1.170). The third highest mean statement by the respondents is "Once I start to work on a task, I keep working until it's done for my satisfaction" (M = 4.24, SD = 2.85). As regards the fourth most agreed statement by students "I read texts several times to find main ideas" (M= 4.20, SD = 1.09). The fifth most agreed statement is "When I want to improve my academic performance, I make some decisions and stick to them until I reach the goal" (M= 4.19, SD = .893).

## 2. Discussion

According to the findings of the current research, self-directed learning proves to be a highly effective strategy empowering learners to assume control over their educational journey. This approach involves learners actively diagnosing their learning needs, identifying learning objectives, selecting suitable learning strategies, and evaluating their progress and outcomes. All male and female undergraduate students' perceptions are valuable regarding self-directed learning experiences and practices. Through self-directed learning, students gain confidence as well as readiness to explore new subjects and acquire knowledge using their skills and abilities. Self-directed learning makes the students to be confidential. They are ready to learn about new things and gain knowledge through the use of their skills. In comparison to earlier studies conducted by

Brookfield (2013), it is evident that self-directed learning empowers adults to take control of their learning journey, granting them the authority to make decisions on what and how to learn, as well as when they have sufficiently mastered a subject. As further observed by Knowles *et al*. (2005), self-directed learners possess the autonomy to opt for highly instructor-led courses if they align with their specific learning needs and preferences. According to the findings, the majority of the students first set their goals for learning and used different strategies to solve the problem or any difficulty during learning. The majority of the students read the text several times to find the main idea about the topic. This is very helpful to memorize and understand the whole topic for students because, in this way, students know the concept of every sentence/passage, and know about the difficult words' meanings which is helpful to increase their vocabulary. Self-directed learning can be described as a six-step process: developing goals for study; outlining assessment concerning how the learner will know when they achieve those goals; identifying the structure and sequence of activities; laying out a timeline to complete activities; identifying resources to achieve each goal; and locate a mentor/faculty member to provide feedback on the plan. They make efforts to learn the meaning of new words. Students must understand the purpose of self-directed learning practices – to determine the next step in their learning and what objectives are being assessed – and that they will be given full possibilities to use the guidance given to enhance their learning as a result of those learning achievements. In self-directed learning, mistakes are acceptable since they indicate that there is still potential for improvement. As compared to previous research high-order, open-ended questions are a powerful medium to engage students and stimulate their curiosity. This eventually leads them down the path of self-directed learning. Develop questions that compel students to think critically, analyze, and research (Ishika Jain, Dec 2019).

## 3. Conclusions

The study concluded that the participant of highest semester is more self-directed towards their learning due to elder in age and more experiences. They remained more concerned toward their maximum learning, and setting goals. Furthermore, the study concluded that male students are more self-directed towards their learning instead of female students. The study also concluded that the students of natural sciences are more self-directed towards their learning than the students of social sciences. The study also concluded the highly perceived statements among undergraduate students which includes their efforts towards exploring the meaning of new words, always ready to seek knowledge, remained consistent towards their tasks, remained in touch for getting new ideas, make decisions and remained persistent till achieving the goal.

## 4. Recommendations

- On the base of the study it is recommended to organize seminars and training sessions for students to familiarize them with self-directed learning and enhance their evaluation skills.

- The institutions should facilitate the students towards self-directed learning and teachers' must motivate them so that learning can make more meaningful.

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