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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING COMPETENCES: A PREREQUISITE FOR DEVELOPING LIFELONG LEARNING ATTITUDE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses self-directed learning competences as a prerequisite for developing the attitude that learning is lifelong. Attitude whether good or bad is a behaviour or trait developed and acquired in course of a person's life journey. Positive attitude to learn is required for people to adapt, meet up with the unprecedented changes in the 21st century and live a positive and rewarding life. Similarly, competences are quite necessary and imperative for a successful life. Self-directed learning competences are seen as highly desirable and a precursor for developing a lifelong learning attitude which is quite essential for any progressive person to meet up with the pace of information and technological revolution in this century. This paper discusses self-directed learning, self-directed learning competences, attitude for lifelong learning, lifelong learning, importance of developing lifelong learning attitude and relationship between self-directed learning and lifelong learning attitude. Implications of the study were established. Conclusion and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning; Competences; Lifelong Learning Attitude

Introduction

In the present rapidly evolving world, the ability to learn independently and continuously is more crucial than ever before because of the need for adaptation and survival in all facets of life. With advancement in technology, changes in the global economy and the emergence of new industries, people of different interests, needs and aspirations need to possess the rightful skills, competences and mindsets to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing landscape through lifelong learning (LLL). Lifelong learning (LLL) involves continuing learning which a person engages in throughout his or her life. It includes but is not limited to learning that occurs in schools. It includes learning in formal, non-formal and informal ways through knowledge building (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO, 2011). It is

not a type of education but a conception of education as a self-motivated process which takes place throughout an individual's life. Lifelong learning (LLL) as defined by the European lifelong learning initiative cited in Karatas, Senturk and Tekel (2021) is an ongoing supportive process that encourages individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they need throughout their lives for necessary application and adaptation. In line with this viewpoint, Obidiegwu (2023:20) noted that "in this digital era changes are constant and there is need for corresponding pace of change in acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to keep up with the constant changes". The author advocated lifelong learning and described it as the only antidote for acquisition of competences required to keep pace with the unprecedented changes in all areas of study and life. Obidiegwu (2023) therefore defined LLL as development of the potentials of an individual through continuing learning in order to improve the person's quality of life and self-worth for positive impact in family and the society. Lifelong (LLL) implies education throughout life which is not specific to a particular age group or field of study. It can therefore be rightly said that only educators and learners who have developed the attitude that learning is lifelong can adapt, adjust and catch up with the unprecedented changes in this digital era. This justifies the need for LLL in order to meet the demands of various jobs, social activities, families and communities, coupled with the need to earn a living which does no longer give room for face-to-face learning contact in the 21st century. This need for LLL requires self-directed learning (SDL) effort which in this paper is seen as a pre-requisite for LLL.

Self-directed learning involves the ability to take initiative, set goals and manage one's own learning process. It is a learning strategy in which a person takes initiative and responsibility for his own learning (Obidiegwu, 2023). Its application cuts across traditional educational settings and extends to all aspects of life, including personal and professional development. Self-directed learning (SDL) can be described as an instructional plan in which an individual manages his or her own learning (Karatas, 2017). According to Knowles (1975), SDL is the process in which a learner takes responsibility for his or her learning by planning, implementing and evaluating his or her learning needs and outcomes with or without the help of a teacher or facilitator. As further noted by Knowles, SDL can be described as a process in which an individual defines his or her own learning needs, establishes learning objectives, determines human and material resources for learning, choose the appropriate learning strategy for the information to learn, and evaluates his learning outcomes. SDL enables an individual to develop competences which makes the person to develop an attitude that learning is a lifelong process. These SDL competences include motivation, goal setting, planning, organizing, initiative and responsibility (Ozdmali & Ozdal, 2014). Furthermore, it includes self-monitoring and reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving, information literacy, communication skills, adaptability, flexibility and self-efficacy (Morris, 2019). Acquiring these SDL competences is increasingly quite

essential for success in this 21st century because it equips one with the competences for becoming a lifelong learner. A lifelong learner can be referred to as a person who continues to acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes for necessary adaptation throughout life (Laal, 2011). Lifelong learning is quite necessary because in this world of unprecedented changes, individuals who embrace lifelong learning are better equipped to navigate challenges in life, seize opportunities and remain competitive in family life, workforce and business. Becoming a lifelong learner for a successful life is only possible through acquiring SDL competences. SDL competences help one to develop the attitude that learning is lifelong, therefore, developing the attitude that learning is lifelong can only be acquired through imbibing in a child self-directed learning competences very early in life for a rewarding adult life (Obidiegwu, 2023). SDL can therefore, be rightly described as a panacea for developing the attitude that learning is lifelong.

According to Latchanna and Dagnew, as cited in Sari and Ashadi (2020) attitude is an important concept for understanding human behaviour and is defined as a mindset comprising beliefs and feelings. Attitude in this paper include beliefs that influence the learner's view of the learning process. It is imperative that parents, facilitators, teachers and students develop the attitude that learning is lifelong. This will spur them to acquire SDL competences. Karatas et al (2021) noted the connection between developing lifelong learning abilities and constructivist viewpoint in helping learners to learn. Similarly, Sahan (2020) findings revealed that a negative relationship existed between lifelong learning tendencies and essentialist education beliefs, while a positive relationship existed between progressive and reconstructive education beliefs. In the viewpoints of Karatas et al (2021) educators who have the attitude that learning is lifelong will have progressivist-learner-centred conception of education. This notion implies that education system in all societies should be made participative, collaborative and flexible enough in order to meet the diverse interest and needs of learners and the society towards helping learners to develop various SDL competences. In addition, it is needful that educators equip learners with SDL skills to help them develop lifelong learning attitude (UNESCO in Karatas et al, 2021). Furthermore, it is important that facilitators acquire SDL competences in order to become agents of social change and be able to transform learners and to equip them with the learning skills required for adaptation in this 21st century. Teachers and facilitators who have internalized SDL skills are needed to create lifelong learning societies (Braun, Marz, Mertens & Nisser, 2020). Based on the foregoing background, the authors of this paper did a critical analysis on SDL competences which they view as a required condition for developing LLL attitude and survival in this century. Therefore, this paper through comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature, empirical evidence and evaluation discussed the following major subheadings:

- Overview of self-directed learning
- Self-directed learning competences
- Overview of lifelong learning
- Attitude for lifelong learning
- Importance of developing LLL attitude

- Relationship between SDL and LLL attitude

Overview of Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

Self-directed learning (SDL) can simply be referred to as a kind of learning which an individual carries out on his own with little or no assistance by a teacher. Self-directed learning (SDL) as defined by Loeng (2020) and Karatas, Senturk and Tekel (2021) implies a process whereby an individual takes initiative and responsibility for his own learning. SDL dated back to England in the 1800s, where terms such as self-help, self-improvement, and self-education were used. According to Conner (2012), different phrases have been used to describe self-directed learning (SDL), including self-planned learning, self-teaching, autonomous learning, independent study, lifelong learning, active learning, and student-centered education. Each of these terms contributed to the assorted definitions and use of SDL as a teaching method, an educational goal and personal management characteristics (Conner, 2012). Self-directed learning is defined as a process of learning in which an individual establishes elements of control over his own learning, through self-efficacy and motivation (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). Self-direction empowers a learner to take personal responsibility for his own learning by choosing how to use information in the construction of his own meaning. Self-directed learning as observed by Morris (2019) is purposeful in the sense that individuals initiate their own learning to find solutions to concrete goals or new-world problems which are possible through several applications. For example, many new-world learning opportunities are initiated for highly practical reasons, such as making good decisions, embarking on projects or carrying out a task related to one's job, home, family, sport or hobby. The learner assumes responsibility for setting his learning objectives, managing tasks, controlling the methods and resources used to achieve personal goals, solve problems and meet perceived demands (Morris, 2019). Self-directed learning gives learners the freedom and autonomy to choose the what, why, how and where of their learning (Guglielmino, 2013). Chukwunemerem (2023) described self-directed learning as a learning process in which decision around what to learn, how to learn it, and how to decide if one has learned something well enough are all in the hands of the learner.

One of the justifications of SDL is that the present era of knowledge explosion, unprecedented changes and continuing technological revolution calls for versatility in acquisition of competence and keeping corresponding pace of speed in continuing learning. In this instance, an individual can adapt to these changes only by taking charge of his education, owning his learning and becoming a lifelong learner. It is therefore not appropriate to view education as just transmission of knowledge, content or mere mastering of bodies of fact in a classroom, but rather, as a process of continuing learning in which people acquire the ability to constantly learn by searching and extracting information (Braun, Marz, Mertens & Nisser, 2020) with a teacher serving as a guide, mentor, facilitator if need be. This process facilitates an individual to become a lifelong learner for acquisition of competences and application of

such knowledge and skills under changing family, organizational and societal conditions. This competence can be acquired through performance–based education which usually occurs as an individual embarks on lifelong self-directed learning and inquiry in various learning environment (not only in school, includes both on-line and offline environment) for subsequent application for solution of real-life challenges. This is necessary in order to gain awareness, aspirations, skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and interest relevant to the solution of life problems in the present world of constant changes. The use of internet makes learning available from multiple sources and therefore a teacher should not see himself as a custodian of all correct information and knowledge but a guide, facilitator, resource person, change agent and mentor for meaningful transformation of the learner (Obidiegwu, 2023). Educators should redirect the mind-set of their students from course-taking (just to earngrades and scores) to problem solving in their societies for them to live rewarding life after graduation from school. This implies that the view of learning as memorization should give way to a problem-solving orientation to acquisition of knowledge, skills and values acquired through SDL for necessary application (Obidiegwu, 2023).

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) Competences

Self-directedness in learning can be referred to as autonomy, freedom and independence in learning. Similarly, competence can be referred to as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. Self-directed learning competences encompass a range of cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective skills necessary for effective independent learning. There are several competences associated with SDL which fosters lifelong learning in adult learners. These competences empower adult learners to become active participants in their education. It enables them to learn autonomously, adapt to diverse learning environments and own their learning. In the context of adult education, self-directed learning competences are particularly valuable for fostering lifelong learning attitudes and facilitating meaningful learning experiences. These SDL competences include but are not limited to the following:

Motivation to learn: This is the drive or desire to learn, achieve goals, and engage continuously in lifelong learning process voluntarily. Motivation is the desire to engage in an activity that emerges from the inherent enjoyment of such activity or a sense of commitment to engage in a task (Pink, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Learners with high motivation to learn are more likely to set and pursue learning goals persistently which is simultaneous to developing lifelong learning attitude. This is the reason Malcom Knowles, the propounder of the theory of andragogy build the theory around motivation to show that motivation to learn facilitates learning and particularly SDL. Motivation as a SDL competence is of two types extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. A lifelong learner is propelled more by an internal force (intrinsic)than external (extrinsic) force to learn. He has internal drive and capacity that propels him to continue learning voluntarily because most often he does not seek for external rewards but internal satisfaction. A lifelong learner sees learning as pleasurable, interesting, enjoyable and geared towards

achieving a purpose for solution of real-life problems. Intrinsic motivation propels learners to explore new ideas, seek new challenges and opportunities in learning. It is self-driven and is not reliant on any kind of external reinforcement by anybody but boosts an individual morale and enables him to perform at his best because the purpose is internally driven and rewarding. Intrinsic motivation is a natural instinct which should be nurtured and promoted more in students than extrinsic motivation from infancy to adulthood in order to sustain SDL.

Objective setting: Setting own objective influences motivation by making a desired future event clear and concrete. An objective must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART).An objective creates an intended target to guide a learner and motivate his action. Similarly, objective promotes persistence, development, modification of plans, and strategies to carry out learning activity. It is a reference point that provides feedback on a learner's performance. In any learning environment, after clarifying the task to be done, a facilitator can support learner's personalized goals by explicitly explaining how the objective-setting process works and why it is important (Marzano, 2007).

Planning and Organisation: This means the capacity to develop a structured plan, allocate resources, and organize time effectively for one's learning activities. Ability to plan and organize nurtures and fosters lifelong learning attitude which ensures that learners can efficiently manage their time, materials, and resources efficiently to achieve their learning goals.

Initiative and Responsibility: It is a willingness to take full responsibility for one's actions. Learners who demonstrate personal responsibility operate with integrity and act in concordance with clear ethical principles (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Personal responsibility emerges from an intrinsic desire to create ways that benefit oneself, one's learning environment, and the greater society towards solution of life problems. Personal responsibility develops on a continuum and is inextricably affected by the social context in which learning occurs (Banz, 2009: Brocket & Hiemstra, 1991).

Self-Monitoring and Reflection: This is learning by modeling how to monitor and adjust using feedback and meta-cognitive thinking. Decades of research support the ideas that more feedback, when delivered effectively, produces greater learning (Black & William; Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering & Pollack, 2001). Feedback is defined as specific information about how learners are doing in their efforts to reach a goal. According to Wiggins (2012) effective feedback must be goal –A referenced, tangible and transparent, actionable, specific and personalized, timely, ongoing and consistent. Monitoring allows individuals to assess changing task demands, focus awareness on their mistakes and generate internal feedback, while self-reflection helps individuals interpret feedback, learn from their mistakes and make decisions that enhance subsequent learning and performance (Digiacomo, 2014).

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: It is the ability to analyse information critically, synthesize knowledge, and apply problem solving skills to real world situations. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are

essential competences for making informed decisions, facing challenges encountered during the learning process and transferring knowledge to new contexts which is also simultaneous to developing lifelong learning. Similarly, Freire (1970) emphasized on raising critical consciousness of a learner,democratic learning, critical thinking, creativity and dialogue which are seen as fostering SDL and lifelong learning. Freire referred to the rigid processes in the formal school system as oppressive and dehumanizing because it fosters a sense of students' dependency on the teacher. He refers to the lecture method of teaching as the "banking method" where students are seen as empty bank accounts awaiting continuing deposits or 'empty receptacles' awaiting information or knowledge which hinders the mindset of autonomy and SDL. Freire emphasized that learners should be active agents in their learning.

Information Literacy: It is the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information from diverse sources. Information literacy competence ensures that learners can access and utilize a variety of resources to support their learning goals, fostering independence in information gathering which helps them develop lifelong learning attitude.

Communication Skills: It involves the capability to express ideas clearly, engage in meaningful dialogue, and collaborate with others. Effective communication skills enable learners to articulate their thought, seek feedback and engage in collaborative learning experiences with peers, hence, it facilitates SDL

Adaptability and Flexibility: This involves the willingness and ability to adapt to changing circumstances, embrace new learning methods, and adjust goals as needed. Adaptability is crucial for nurturing lifelong learning attitude. It allows learners to navigate challenges, seize opportunities and remains resilient, which is quite necessary for lifelong learning (Knowles, 1980).

Self-Efficacy: This refers to belief in one's capacity to successfully accomplish learning tasks and achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy influences motivation and perseverance, it impacts the learner's confidence in his ability to master new content and skills which ignites lifelong learning attitudes (Kumari, A &Chamunsdeswari, S. (2023). All these abilities, if imbibed in an individual from infancy will enable the person develop the attitude that learning is lifelong. Acquiring self-directed competences by an individual from infancy as discussed in this section is a precursor for developing the attitude that learning is lifelong. This discourages dependency in pursuing learning goals for mental freedom and wisdom and for a dynamic and rewarding life in this 21st century (Obidiegwu, 2023).

Attitude for Lifelong Learning

Attitude refers to an expression of a person's disposition especially of the mind. A person's attitude is often expressed through his behaviour. According to Sari and Ashadi (2020), attitude towards learning refers to an individual's reaction towards learning. In this paper attitude is referred to as a way of thinking or feeling about something. Therefore, lifelong learning attitude in this paper refers to as a way of thinking, belief or disposition which someone develops in relation to lifelong learning which may be

positive or negative. When the attitude to lifelong learning is positive, it implies that an individual nurtures a sense of curiosity, open-mindedness and constantly seeks knowledge for adaptation to changes in family, institution, organization and society towards facing challenges in these areas appropriately. It further implies that such person enjoys learning by reflection, questioning, collaboration, critical-thinking and creativity in order to learn new skills. Lifelong learning attitude focuses on knowledge and skills needed in this information era by everyone regardless of age or social status. Hence, Obidiegwu (2023) asserted that in this era of unprecedented changes positive learning attitude is needed for meaningful adaptation and a rewarding life. It is the viewpoint of the authors of this paper that educators should adopt lifelong learning attitude and also imbue in their students such qualities inorder to build their confidence, foster their careers, jobs, mental health and build their potentials. Furthermore, lifelong learning attitude is quite necessary for competitiveness, employability, adaptation, social inclusion and active citizenship and for continuous curiosity for discovery and acquisition of skills for facing lifelong challenges and solution of life problems.

Overview of Lifelong Learning (LLL)

Lifelong learning implies pursuing education throughout life. This implies that education starts from the cradle and ends at the grave. Lifelong learning enhances not only social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability (Karatas et al, 2021) for survival. Ozcan and Uzunboylu (2012) described lifelong learning as a process that includes a rapid change through which individuals acquire competences in different areas during their lives. Ozdamli and Ozdal (2014) stated that every individual needs to learn throughout life for occupational and individual needs, the authors further indicated that changing world conditions and developing technology makes lifelong learning essential for all individuals. World Science (2016) stated that people's live consist of such learning or studying concepts as perceiving, comparing, analyzing, concluding and giving feedback. LLL includes all learning experiences which an individual involves-in, in order to develop knowledge, skills and competences. In a study, Gorghiu, Dogan and Gerceker (2013), the authors stated that lifelong learning approach is recognition of an individual and his world, creating new things, developing learning habits and behavioural mannerisms for a rewarding life.

Similarly, Preece (2013) defined LLL as all activities that include informal learning which continues from birth to death and has a comprehensive and visional structure. Lifelong learning disputes and frowns at the idea that learning occurs only at the formal structure of an educational institution, it upholds that education occurs throughout one's life-time. It is a broad concept which implies that education is flexible, diverse and available at different times and places throughout life. It implies that learning can no longer be adjudged to be acquired only in school at a particular time but a process which goes on throughout life. It is an on-going process acquired through daily interactions with others and with the entire globe. This has

led to the realization that formal learning is referring to the sequenced programme of teaching and learning activities and experiences organized around defined content areas, topics, and resources, the objectives of which are accessed in various ways including examination and various type of assignments, laboratories sections and other practical activities. According to Leask, 2009 and Kaphan 2016 lifelong learning competences include self-management, learning-to-learn competences, initiative and entrepreneurship competences, digital competences and decision-making competences. Similarly, the European Commission as cited in Kaphan (2016) identified communication in the native and foreign languages; basic competences in mathematics; science and technology; digital competences; learning to learn competences; social and citizenship competences, initiative, entrepreneurship competences, cultural awareness and expression competences as lifelong competences. It is pertinent to note that without acquiring SDL competences it will be very difficult for an individual to develop the attitude that learning is lifelong.

Importance of Developing Lifelong Learning Attitudes (LLLA)

In this era of unprecedented changes developing LLL attitude is essential for individuals to adapt to new challenges, remain competitive in the job market, and lead fulfilling lives. A positive attitude towards lifelong learning is associated with personal growth, career success, and overall well-being. Cultivating a lifelong learning attitude promotes a culture of continuous improvement creativity, analytical thinking and innovation in society which can be associated with SDL. According to Andreev (2023) the importance of developing LLLA is considered based on the perspective that whether an individual is pursuing personal interest and passions or chasing professional ambitions, lifelong learning attitude can help such a person to achieve personal fulfillment and satisfaction. It recognizes that humans have a natural drive to explore, learn, grow and improve own quality of life and sense of self-worth by paying attention to learning ideas and goals that are inspiring to their lives. Lifelong learning thus, recognizes that not all learning comes from a classroom but learning comes from all learning environment throughout life.Similarly, an individual better understands and creates knowledge instead of memorizing concept and principles.

Relationship Between Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Lifelong Learning Attitude (LLLA)

Self-directed learning capacities shapes LLL attitude from cradle to grave. As explained in the section of SDL competences in this paper, intrinsic motivation is a lifetime instinct which when it is nurtured from childhood provides a basis for lifelong learning attitude. Similarly, ability to set owns learning goal and pursue it which is an SDL attribute enables an individual to be successful in LLL process. SDL abilities enable an individual to take initiative for learning (Knowles cited in Tekkol & Demirel, 2018), set clear goals, shape learning process in line with such goals and plans, monitor own learning process and evaluate the outcomes of own learning.

In addition, it enables an individual to be open to learning, curious, willing to learn, value

own learning and have self-control. These abilities enable an individual to develop a LLL attitude and become a lifelong learner. For Tekkol and Demirel (2018), there is a great relationship between SDL and developing LLL attitudes. Tekkol and Demirel emphasized that a mutual relationship exists between the two concepts, in the sense that self-directed learning abilities moulds an individual to become a lifelong learner. On the other hand, one of the main aims of lifelong learning is to equip individuals with skills and competences that enable them to learn by themselves which is same as SDL. According to Spencer and Jordan as cited in Tekkol and Demirel (2018), self-directed learning prepares individuals for lifelong learning. Hence, educators, mentors, facilitators and resource persons should continually equip their students, mentees, children and adult learners with SDL competences for adaptation and survival to the unprecedented changes in the 21st century.

Implications of the Study

Lifelong learning is a pre-requisite for survival in this constantly changing world and information era. This implies that any person who does not develop the attitude that learning is lifelong will find it very difficult to meet up with the unprecedented changes in this 21st century. Survival will become very difficult for such person because the person will be overtaken by socio-economic, cultural, political and technological changes among others.

The study further implies that education should be redefined as a process of continuing inquiry whereby the role of an educator should be seen as a guide by the side. An educator should guide students as they learn from many sources. He should be a change agent who transforms the learner and a resource person who provides meaningful resources for self-directed inquiry needed for LLL and not just a teacher who transmits knowledge for completion of course outline and content derived from a fixed curriculum and subject matter. Education must be seen as a process of continuing lifelong learning to enable learners overcome failures in life pursuits associated with obsolescence.

It suggests that education should be shifted from teacher-centered to learner–centered approaches in which students are engaged using experiential learning approaches and hands–on activities. This study further implies that SDL competences should be continuously imbibed in an individual by parents, teachers and caregivers from infancy so that as the person grows older, he will develop an increasing self-concept of autonomy in learning and in life pursuits.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the critical role of self-directed learning competences in fostering the attitude that learning is lifelong. It therefore concludes that SDL competences if initiated and nurtured in an individual from childhood will enable such person to develop the attitude that learning is lifelong, the person becomes autonomous/independent and resilient in learning. Furthermore, the person will develop a lifelong learning attitude and become successful in the lifelong learning process for a rewarding life.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis and findings made in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. In all learning environments students/learners of different ages and social status should be equipped with SDL competences for them to develop the attitude that learning is lifelong and that learning does not take place only in the four walls of the school system.
2. An educator should see his role in any learning environment as that of a facilitator, mentor, change agent and guide and not that of transmitter of information. This is necessary so that the mindset and attitude of students should be directed towards solution of life problems and not just course-taking or fulfilling credit-hours for grades in school.
3. In all learning environment learner-centred approaches such as peer review, debate, role-play, presentation, brain-storming, discussion and other activity-based approaches are recommended because they encourage creativity, critical and analytical thinking, collaboration and communication among others. These are all embedded in the SDL competences.
4. Parents should imbue in their children (from home) the self-concept of independence and not a mind-set of dependency which discourages resilience and persistence in learning and in life for a successful life.

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