


# Exploring University Students' Self-Directed Learning in Online Learning

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study aims to understand the situation of university students' SDL and identify the factors that help university students solve the problem of SDL in online learning. It involved seven participants who were selected according to the inclusion criteria. Using thematic analysis of the interview data, the researchers found that the university students' perceptions of the problems of SDL in online learning are: traditional teaching and learning limits SDL, lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of the SDL process, insufficient awareness of SDL, insufficient effective resources for SDL, methods of teaching SDL need to be improved, and inadequate online learning platform. Besides, reforming online teaching and learning models, building a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating SDL, strengthening university students' knowledge of SDL, improving online learning resources, improving methods of teaching SDL, and creating an online favorable atmosphere for university students are solutions to help university students solve the problem of SDL in online learning.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Education, Learner, Learning, Lecturer, Online, Platform, Self-Directed Learning, Student, University

## INTRODUCTION

Technology in the age of globalization is growing very fast. All sectors, including education, must integrate with technology to generate competitive human resources. At the same time, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in education has shifted from offline face-to-face classroom instruction to online learning, with unlimited access at any time and from any location. With the impact of globalization, education will be more open and two-way, diversified, multidisciplinary, and related to competitive productivity (Serevina, 2018). Self-directed learning (SDL) is a variety of learning processes related to goal-directed, self-controlled learning behaviors (e.g., Fisher & King, 2010; Schmidt, 2000). Knowles (1975), a pioneer in the field, defined SDL as follows: without the help of others, a person can take the initiative to diagnose his own learning needs, set learning goals, determine human and material resources for learning, select and implement appropriate learning strategies, and the process of evaluating learning outcomes. SDL develops learner skills that correspond to challenges in the modern world, and some learning departs from traditional

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learning methods because it builds the capabilities required for continuous professional education (AbuAssi & Alkorashy, 2016).

However, it is noteworthy that there have been significant educational changes during the COVID-19 pandemic (Flores, 2020). Before other universities worldwide adopted online learning, Chinese universities were the first to discontinue all offline face-to-face learning (Jiang et al., 2021). During the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools worldwide, including universities, were forced to address the restrictions provided by standardized programs, including full school closures and an immediate and complete transition to online learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). Online SDL has become the new normal for college and university students (Al Zahrani et al., 2021), which is defined as the education of Internet delivery, a necessary change to include in regions where online learning is underdeveloped (Akabayashi et al., 2023). Students must use SDL skills to meet immediate educational needs, as any other professional or general training type is impossible. Besides, lecturers must quickly develop online teaching skills (Chen et al., 2020), and students need to adapt to SDL (Chen et al., 2022; Gerard et al., 2022; Safa & Wicaksono, 2022). In addition to adaptation, university students still have many defects and problems in online learning (Teng & Li, 2020).

Exploring university students' SDL in online learning is pivotal because it empowers students with autonomy, adaptability, and lifelong skills, fostering flexibility in managing diverse commitments. SDL fosters resilience, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and academic accomplishments, preparing students for obstacles they will face in the real world. Setting and achieving personal goals improves motivation and academic achievement. Moreover, it fosters international cooperation, technological competence, and an attitude of perpetual improvement, highlighting its critical role in molding a well-rounded and future-ready student (Hou, 2023). In the constantly changing field of higher education, it is imperative to comprehend and maximize SDL in virtual environments. In this context, this study aims to adopt a qualitative case study design with one-to-one interview and focus group discussion techniques to investigate university students' SDL, which enabled them to overcome learning difficulties during online learning to fulfill their learning goals.

## **PURPOSE**

Based on the background and development of online learning, this study aims to understand the present situation of university students' SDL to explore their perceptions of the problems of SDL in online learning. This study also tries to identify the factors to help university students solve the problem of SDL in online learning, and then implement targeted improvement countermeasures to help their SDL practice. This study hopes to ensure that university students can better play to SDL's initiative and develop good SDL habits.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

There are two research questions, as follows:

1. What are the university students' perceptions of the problems of self-directed learning in online learning?
2. What are the factors to help university students solve the problem of self-directed learning in online learning?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this expansive landscape of SDL within higher education and online learning, the insights gleaned from numerous perspectives contribute to a rich tapestry of understanding. The literature

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