Chapter 6
Enhancing Self-Directed Learning Through Self-Assessment and Peer Feedback in Open, Distance, and E-learning (ODeL) Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how self-assessment and peer feedback enhance self-directed learning (SDL) in Open, Distance, and E-learning (ODeL) environments. Drawing on empirical studies published between 2014 and 2024 and following PRISMA guidelines, the review ensured rigour, transparency, and relevance. Findings show that self-assessment and peer feedback strengthen learner autonomy, critical thinking, and collaboration, which are essential for SDL. Their success, however, depends on effective digital tools, strong institutional support, and targeted training for both learners and educators. The study highlights challenges in implementation and stresses the need for comprehensive approaches

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that promote accessibility and participation. It concludes that integrating these strategies meaningfully can unlock their full potential, offering valuable insights for enhancing SDL in ODeL and guiding future research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st-century knowledge economy, higher education is increasingly expected to equip learners with the ability to direct their own learning, adapt to changing environments, and continuously acquire new skills. Self-Directed Learning (SDL) has therefore become a foundational competence in modern pedagogy. SDL is conceptualised as a process in which learners take active responsibility for setting learning goals, identifying appropriate strategies, evaluating progress, and regulating their own motivation (Walsh, 2017; Peno, 2024). This positions SDL as a bridge between widening access and meaningful success in digitally mediated systems. Scholars such as Robinson and Persky (2019) and Morris (2019) note that SDL is not only a learning strategy but also a transformative capability underpinning lifelong learning, employability, and personal agency in dynamic, digitally mediated societies. If SDL is the graduate attribute, ODeL is the testing ground where it must actually work.

The importance of SDL is magnified in Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODeL) environments, where the absence of immediate instructor guidance places greater emphasis on learner autonomy, time management, and metacognitive regulation (Geduld, 2019; Setlhodi, 2019). Unlike traditional classroom-based learning, ODeL requires learners to navigate asynchronous content, engage with digital platforms, and sustain motivation over extended periods (Lembani et al., 2022). In the African context, ODeL has emerged as an essential vehicle for widening access to higher education; however, this modality also reveals systemic challenges such as limited digital literacy, uneven access to technology, and socio-economic inequities that affect learners' SDL readiness (Botha & Potgieter, 2024; Shikalepo & Hautemo, 2021).

In Open, Distance & e-Learning (ODeL), flexible pacing and reduced real-time instructor presence shift responsibility to learners, amplifying the need for metacognition, time management, and digital navigation (Geduld, 2019; Setlhodi, 2019). In African systems, ODeL widens participation but also exposes digital access and readiness disparities that shape SDL uptake (Botha & Potgieter, 2024; Lembani et al., 2022; Shikalepo & Hautemo, 2021). Thus, the question is less "Do learners need SDL?" and more "How do systems cultivate it equitably?" A promising pathway lies in how learners are assessed, not as recipients but as agents.

Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence that SDL positively influences academic achievement, cognitive flexibility, and learner identity (Ezeribe, 2019; Bester, 2021). Bosch and Laubscher (2019) demonstrate that when learners are given