Chapter 1

The Value of Pacing in Promoting Self-Directed Learning

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents significant considerations for pacing amid directing own learning in an open distance e-learning environment (ODeL), assuming principles to achieve learning outcomes through processes that support learning style/s in leading own learning. Looking at a variety of factors, the prototypes for self-directedness and elements for self-pacing are presented. A case of an ODeL institution was explored and interviews conducted (n=57) to examine self-directed learning contextual factors in relation to the speed at which learners assume leadership in achieving learning outcomes within an (ODeL) context and gaining independence towards enhancing learning experience. The outcomes reveal that learners gain independence through adopting suitable speed, adopting core values, collaborating, support provided, and will to improve their skills. Finally, a self-directed paced learning framework for adult learners is offered.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8018-8.ch001
INTRODUCTION

The advent of the fees-must-fall movement and fee-free education in South Africa appears to offer unparalleled opportunities for young adults who are learners in the higher education sector. These youths are engaged in activism and learning and are poised to derive worth through drawing from core values in their education by taking the lead in its reform and assuming responsibility for their learning (Dichaba and Setlhodi, 2017). It is therefore imperative to consider the value of promoting self-directed learning (SDL) in relation to factors that enable learners to assume primary responsibility for learning outcomes, needs, strategies, resources and assessment (Daweti, 2017), and determining the speed at which this will happen. In recent years, SDL has been a mantra for encouraging the pursuit of initiatives related to own learning and the achievement of learning outcomes, particularly in an open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) setting. A learner’s ability to direct his or her own learning generally implies that the learner determines his or her own process and pace of learning in a manner that supports his or her learning style. This is what assuming responsibility for one’s own learning, leading own learning initiatives and showing competencies in directing learning activities at a manageable pace entail.

Pacing refers to the rapidity at which learners want to or need to complete learning content (Cushard, n.d.). It is important to support learning and to provide adequate resources that enable learners to decide the pace at which they can complete their learning. A variety of factors enhance learners’ learning experience. These factors include, among others, pacing, timing, content permanence, peer intention, convenience, cost-effectiveness, ownership, greater focus (Anand, 2015; Cushard, n.d.), and learners’ ability to direct their own learning commensurate with regulating and leading initiatives for their own learning (Loyens, Magda and Rikers, 2008).

BACKGROUND

SDL has been explored from the perspective of personal attributes (Garrison, 1997; 2003), understanding (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012), online environments (Song & Hill, 2007) and factors that promote self-directed learning (Daweti, 2017). However, studies regarding SDL in relation to assuming core values that enable pacing own learning lacks, particularly in an ODeL context, where the learning content is mainly data driven and require heightened effort to achieve the sought after outcomes. There is consensus that a correlation exists between qualities such as self-directed learning and learner achievement (comprising intrinsic competencies enabling positive attributes) (Freitas & Leonard, 2011) as well as inherent values assumed to pace
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