



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**MANIFESTATION OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING
BY ADULT STUDENTS IN A POST-GRADUATE
DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM**

DAING ZAIDAH BINTI DAING IBRAHIM

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra
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Chairman: Y.M. Raja Ahmad Tajuddin Shah bin Raja Abdul Rashid, Ph.D.

Faculty : Educational Studies

The purpose of this research is to understand the manifestation of self-directed learning by a group of adult students studying in a post-graduate distance education program. The research is conducted by examining four research questions: (1) What characteristics of participants as learners are manifested that predispose them to be self-directed?; (2) What are the motivational factors that predispose learners to be self-directed?; (3) What are the self-directed learning activities carried out by learners in the distance education program?; and (4) what are the contextual factors that influence the manifestation of self-directed learning? The study employs the qualitative methodology and the data are collected through in-depth interviews with participants. Informal observations, examination of available documents and interviews with spouses and colleagues are carried out to verify information given by participants.



The adult students were purposefully selected to participate in this study. They included seven adult students studying on a part-time basis in the Master of Science in Human Resource Development program, through distance education at a local university. Interviews have been conducted to obtain their perception, experiences, activities related to self-directed learning in a post-graduate distance education program. The main source of data is from the semi-structured interviews that were taped, transcribed and analyzed. The interviews with the participants lasted for one and a half to two hours.

The study reveals seven characteristics as manifested by the adult students that predispose them to be self-directed, five motivational factors that explained their self-directedness, and two contextual factors that influence the manifestation of self-directed learning. Apart from these findings, one distinct aspect has emerged from the study. It was the transformation of adult students into lifelong self-directed learners as a result of the distance education process that they have gone through.

The study reveals and concludes that adult students manifest self-directed learning when undergoing a formal distance education program that led to the awarding of a Master degree. Self-directed learning has a wider context as indicated in the study, encompassing formal programs with certain requirements and structure as in distance education. The findings are conceptualized into a model of manifestation of a self-directed learner in the context of a distance education program. Some recommendations are proposed for further studies.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk
ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MANIFESTASI PEMBELAJARAN KENDIRI OLEH
PELAJAR-PELAJAR DEWASA DALAM PROGRAM
PASCA SISWAZAH MELALUI PROGRAM PENDIDIKAN JARAK JAUH**

Oleh

DAING ZAIDAH BINTI DAING IBRAHIM

Januari 2002

Pengerusi: Y.M. Raja Ahmad Tajuddin Shah bin Raja Abdul Rashid, Ph.D.

Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menyelidik dan memahami manifestasi pembelajaran sendiri sekumpulan pelajar dewasa yang mengikuti program di peringkat pasca siswazah melalui pendidikan jarak jauh. Kajian ini dilaksanakan berdasarkan empat soalan penyelidikan iaitu: (1) apakah sifat-sifat para peserta sebagai pelajar yang dimanifestasikan sehingga mencenderungkan mereka bersikap sendiri; (2) apakah faktor motivasi yang mencenderungkan mereka bersikap sendiri; (3) apakah aktiviti pembelajaran sendiri yang dijalankan oleh pelajar dalam program jarak jauh yang diikuti; dan (4) apakah factor-faktor kontekstual yang mempengaruhi manifestasi pembelajaran sendiri? Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif dan data dikumpulkan melalui temubual secara mendalam dengan responden. Pemerhatian secara tidak formal, pemeriksaan dokumen-dokumen yang ada dan temubual dengan suami/isteri dan rakan-rakan

sekerja responden turut dilakukan untuk mengesahkan maklumat-maklumat yang diberikan responden.

Pelajar-pelajar dewasa yang menyertai kajian ini telah dipilih dan terdiri dari tujuh orang yang mengikuti pembelajaran secara separuh masa. Mereka mengikuti program Master Sains dalam Pembangunan Sumber Manusia melalui pendidikan jarak jauh di sebuah universiti tempatan. Temubual dijalankan untuk mendapatkan persepsi, pengalaman dan aktiviti-aktiviti mereka yang berkaitan dengan pembelajaran sendiri di peringkat pasca siswazah melalui pendidikan jarak jauh. Sumber data adalah dari temubual secara "semi-structured" yang dirakam, ditranskripkan dan dianalisa. Temubual dengan peserta-peserta berlangsung selama satu jam setengah sehingga ke dua jam.

Kajian ini mendapati tujuh sifat peserta yang dimanifestasikan dan yang mempengaruhi pembelajaran sendiri, lima factor-faktor motivasi yang dapat menjelaskan keupayaan pembelajaran sendiri dan dua factor-faktor kontekstual yang mempengaruhi pembelajaran sendiri mereka. Selain dari penemuan-penemuan tersebut, satu lagi aspek timbul dari kajian ini ialah transformasi pelajar-pelajar dewasa dalam kajian ini kepada pelajar sepanjang hayat secara sendiri ekoran dari proses pembelajaran secara jarak jauh yang telah mereka lalui.

Kajian ini mendapati dan merumuskan bahawa pelajar dewasa memanifestasikan pembelajaran sendiri semasa menjalani pendidikan secara formal melalui program pendidikan jarak jauh. Program formal ini menganugerahkan Ijazah Sarjana

kepada peserta-pesertanya. Pembelajaran sendiri mempunyai konteks yang lebih luas, sebagaimana yang didapati dalam kajian ini, yang merangkumi program formal yang mempunyai syarat-syarat serta strukturnya sendiri seperti program pendidikan jarak jauh. Hasil kajian ini dibentang dalam bentuk satu model manifestasi pembelajaran sendiri oleh pelajar dewasa dalam konteks program pendidikan jarak jauh. Beberapa syor telah dikemukakan untuk kajian lanjut.

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I dedicate this humble work to my beloved husband, Dr. Azmuddin Ibrahim, and children Izwah Azyyati, Ruhil Amal, Muhammad Azfar, Iman, Abdullah and Jihad. To my husband, Dr. Azmuddin, my heartfelt thanks for his patience and prayers that have helped me throughout my study. To my children, I hope my endeavor will be an inspiration to them to pursue their education to the highest level.



This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia has been accepted as fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IDEAL	-	Institute for Distance Education and Learning
INTAN	-	The National Institute of Public Administration
IT	-	Information Technology
KL	-	Kuala Lumpur
MS HRD	-	Master of Science, Human Resources Development
UKM	-	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UNIMAS	-	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
UPM	-	Universiti Putra Malaysia
USM	-	Universiti Sains Malaysia



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Andragogy and self-directed learning were the first two attempts by adult educators to define adult education as a unique field of practice, one that could be differentiated from learning in general and childhood education in particular (Merriam, 2001).

Andragogy, defined by Knowles (1980, p.43) as “the art and science of helping adults learn” is the best-known theory of adult learning. The theory is based upon five assumptions, all of which are characteristics of an adult learner who (1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to his changing social roles, (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external forces. Based on the assumptions, the scholar proposes a program planning model for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational experiences with adults.

About the same time when Knowles introduces andragogy to North American adult educators, self-directed learning appears as another model that helps to define adult learning as different from children (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1975)



explains the concept of self-directed learning in a book and outlines how to implement it through learning contracts. This contributes to the self-directed learning literature. Tough (1967, 1971) building on the work of Houle (1961), provides the first comprehensive description of self-directed learning as a form of study. Tough undertakes the study of self-directed learning projects of sixty-six Canadians. Tough's work generates one of the major thrusts of research in the field of adult education.

Following the study by Tough (1967, 1971), many studies had been conducted related to self-directed learning (Houle, 1961; Tough, 1971; Coolican, 1974; Knowles, 1975; Guglielmino, 1977; Torrance & Mourad, 1978; Gibbon, et. al, 1980; Sabbaghian, 1980; Savioe, 1980; Brookfield, 1981a and 1981b; Hiemstra & Penland, 1981; Spear & Mocker, 1984; Reynolds, 1986; Cafarella & O'Donell, 1987; Shaw, 1987; Six & Hiemstra, 1987; Ravid, 1987; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Confessore & Confessore, 1992; and Hiemstra, 1991).

These studies focus on adults' participation and learning orientation (Houle, 1961), adults' learning projects (Tough, 1971; Tough, 1979), foundations and principles of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975), characteristics of self-directed learners (Guglielmino, 1977) and environmental circumstances promoting self-directed learning (Spear & Mocker, 1984).

These studies could also be analyzed based on the approaches of inquiry on self-directed learning. Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) concluded that there are three

major “streams” of studies namely descriptive learning projects, measurement of levels of self-directed learning and qualitative studies. Allen Tough’s learning projects fall into the first stream of study.

The second stream of studies is associated with self-directed learning as a personality-related variable. A number of studies are conducted linking self-directedness with concepts such as readiness (Guglielmino, 1977), creativity (Torrance & Mourad, 1978), self-concept (Sabbaghian, 1980) motivational orientation (Reynolds, 1986), intellectual development (Shaw, 1987) and measurement of self-directedness within the classroom settings (Caffarella, 1983; Kasworm, 1983; Savioe, 1980; and Six & Hiemstra, 1987). The results of these researches help in the understanding of self-directed learning from basic descriptions to relationships between variables in explaining the phenomenon.

The third approach of qualitative studies attempts to explain the meanings and context of self-directed learning among adults (Brookfield, 1981; Gibbon, et. al, 1980, Spear & Mocker, 1984). These researches have contributed to theory building and influenced the ways in which researchers and practitioners understand self-direction in adult learning.



Based on the analysis of research and literature, Hiemstra (1994) concludes that there are five major findings related to self-directed learning. These findings are as follows:

1. Several instruments for measuring some self-directed learning aspects have been developed.
2. Self-directed learning readiness has been associated with performance, psychological and social variables.
3. A majority of self-directed learning research efforts have been qualitative in nature.
4. Practice implications and techniques for facilitating self-directed learning are being devised.
5. A coherent self-directed learning theory is still not available.

Hiemstra (1994) and Confessore & Confessore (1992) also observe emerging trends in research on self-directed learning. One trend is a research on the feasibility of self-directed learning meeting some job-related training needs in industry (Ravid, 1987). Another trend is an effort to better understand the role of technology in self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). A third trend is related to researchers' focus on enhancing self-directed learning by understanding environmental factors better (Spear & Mocker, 1984). Hiemstra (1991) and his colleague describe various ways such as physical, social and psychological aspects of the learning environment that can be affected.

Self-directed learning remains a viable arena for theory building related to adult learning. Merriam (2001) says that self-directed learning appears to be at a juncture in terms of which direction research and theory building should take in order to advance our understanding of this important dimension of adult learning. Brockett (2000) notes that the level of interest in self-directed learning across the field as a whole seems to have diminished. A recent content analysis of 14 periodicals in adult education and training from 1980 to 1998 reveals that there are 122 articles on self-directed learning that have been published in these periodicals (Brockett, Stockdale, Fogerson, Cox, Canipe, Chuprina et al. 2000).

Brockett (2000) says that the “heyday” for articles of self-directed learning in these publications is in the mid-late 1980s and first two years of the 1990s. In the past two to three years, however, the number of articles on self-direction in these publications has dropped to as few as zero in some years. He states that it is possible to take the view that it is time to move on to new areas of inquiry. The tendency of researchers to respond to shifting trends while abandoning lines of inquiry that have not been adequately mined, he says, is one of the historic problems with adult education research. Brockett thus presents the view that the real challenge facing those working in this area is how to take the study of self-direction to a new level. The development of another instrument, a focus on the quality of the experience, studying how people engage and manage their self-directed learning, and asking about the ethical use or misuse of self-directed learning are suggestions for this new work (Brockett, personal communication, Sept. 28, 2000, cited in Merriam, 2001).



Similarly Merriam & Caffarella (1999) list several areas for investigation as follows:

- How some adults remain self-directed in their learning over long periods of time.
- How the process changes as learning move from novice to expert in subject matter and learning strategies.
- How issues of power and control interact with the use of self-directed learning in formal settings.
- Whether being self-directed as a learner has an impact on one's instruction and planning activities.
- What is the role of public policy on self-directed learning.
- What the critical factors of self-directed learning look like in practice.
- How contextual factors interact with the personal characteristics of self-directed learners.

Clearly, there are numerous possibilities for how future research on self-directed learning might enrich adult education practice as well as contribute to theory in adult learning (Merriam, 2001).

One possibility is to study self-directed learning in the context of distance education. In recent years, more adults are involved in learning through distance education. The connections between distance education and adult education are clear in that the majority of distance learners are adults.

