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READINESS FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Self-Directed Learning (SDL) originated from the adult education movement, emphasizing learner autonomy and self-responsibility. Developed by Malcolm Knowles, SDL has evolved to become a vital approach in modern learning environments. This approach enables learners to take ownership of their learning process, setting goals and managing their own progress. In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, SDL is increasingly recognized for its potential to promote lifelong learning, self-motivation, and adaptability. As the need for continuous professional development grows, self-directed learning readiness (SDLR) has become a crucial factor in determining individuals' ability to navigate complex learning situations, set goals, and manage their own learning processes. SDLR involves a range of skills, including self-assessment, resource utilization, and reflection. The importance of SDL and SDLR lies in their ability to empower learners to take control of their learning, enhancing their capacity to respond to changing demands and stay updated with the latest knowledge and skills, particularly in fields like healthcare, where staying current is critical. This study mainly focuses on Self-Directed Learning Readiness among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

Objective: This study aimed to assess the undergraduate students' readiness for Self-Directed Learning in the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, among 92 undergraduate students. Data was collected using a validated SDL questionnaire, and the overall SDLR was measured based on their individual scores. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 26 (SPSS version-26). Descriptive statistics were utilized to answer the objectives.

Results: A total of 92 students participated in the study. The study found varying levels of SDLR among students. In third-year nursing students, 30.8%, 41.3%, and 3.8% showed very good, good, and poor readiness, respectively. In final-year nursing, 40%,30%, and 10% showed good, average, and poor readiness, respectively. However, there was no significant difference between years in the level of SDLR.

Conclusion: The study concludes that SDLR varies among students, with a significant relationship not found between academic year and SDLR. Gender and SDLR among MBBS students, indicating that readiness increases with academic progression. However, no significant relationship was found between the academic program. These findings suggest that students' readiness for SDL develops as they progress through their academic years, regardless of their program.

Introduction

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is becoming a newer trend in the learning practice (John & Michael, 2018a). Malcolm Knowles defined SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Kaur et al., 2020, p.41).

In SDL, students assume the role of being responsible for their lesson plans, the learning objectives, and the course of action to conduct their studies methodologically. As a result, SDL is categorized as student-centered and independent, in addition to being self-directed and self-educated. Nowadays, SDL is widely practiced as an adult lifelong learning tool, whereby the students can get certain advantages for their future in comparison to the traditional teacher-dominant teaching style (Win & Ahmad, 2023). As a result of individual learning, students have a better chance of realizing and even developing new skills (Samarasooriya et al., 2019).

SDL has evolved considerably, especially in the last few years, mostly because it is relatively cost-effective than many other learning models (Samarasooriya et al., 2019). A planned and efficient SDL allows the learner to gain in-depth knowledge of the area, rather than just learn specifically (Kaur et al., 2020). SDL methodologies involve tailored strategies based on individual needs and goals. Learners set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals to guide their learning process (Gupta et al., 2025). SDL can be implemented through methods such as providing case-based scenarios, guiding learners with questions, and directing them to recommended learning resources for finding answers (Manjunath et al., 2024).

SDL is necessary for learners to transition from passive to active learners. However, many students find the concept of SDL unfamiliar, and they feel fear when they are assigned to SDL activities. The students have learned to look to the teachers for direction on what to learn and how to learn(Manjunath et al., 2024). Teachers act as facilitators, guiding students to build knowledge independently and together. Moreover, formative assessments support skill development, growth, and practical learning, aligning with SDL goals(Piratheeban & Bandara, 2025). If teachers understand how factors like age, gender, caste, language, school, and social environment affect learning, they can adjust the level of self-direction based on the needs of each student. By modifying their approach, teachers can support students in reaching their goals. This should be the main aim of the education system(Sultana, 2024).

For the successful implementation of SDL, students must be independently receptive and ready for SDL(Win & Ahmad, 2023). While everyone possesses some level of self-direction in learning, learners differ in their readiness for SDL (Manjunath et al., 2024). SDL Readiness is individualized(Meng et al., 2019a). Self-directed Learning Readiness (SDLR) means that the learners are responsible for their own learning through a student-centered learning method (Win & Ahmad, 2023). SDLR is "the degree to which the individual possesses the attitudes, abilities, and personality characteristics which are necessary for self-directed learning(Win & Ahmad, 2023, p. 30). It refers to the extent to which learners possess the necessary conditions for autonomous learning, including attitudes, abilities, and personality characteristics (Meng et al., 2019). According to Ranjani Samarasooriya, learning motivation was the most influential factor in learners' SDLR (Samarasooriya et al., 2019).

Therefore, this study aims to assess SDLR among BSc(Hons) Nursing undergraduates in the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

Methods

It's a cross-sectional descriptive study design and was conducted at the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The study population consisted of all third- and fourth-year BSc(Hons) Nursing students enrolled at the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. A complete enumeration approach was used for this study. The total sample size was 92 students, which was equal to the total population. Data were collected using a validated, self-administered questionnaire developed based on an extensive review of the relevant literature. data analysis was done using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to present the obtained results.

According to the mean value of readiness score, the level of readiness was added into five categories.

Table 1: Scores and grades

Score	Grade
0-20	Very poor
21-40	Poor
41-60	Average
61-80	Good
81- 100	Very good

Ethical considerations

This study was ethically cleared by the Ethical Review Committee of the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Permission to collect data was obtained from the Dean of the Faculty of Health Care Sciences at Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants before data collection.

Results

A total of 92 BSc (Hons) Nursing undergraduates were included in the study. Among them, 26 students were male, and 66 were female. Among them, 52 students were third year, and 40 were in their final year.

The analysis of readiness for the SDL of third-year nursing students revealed that 30.8% (n=16) of the students had very good readiness for self-directed learning, 41.3% (n=25) of the students showed good readiness for SDL, and a very small number of students, 3.8% (n=11), showed poor readiness for SDL.

Table 2: Readiness for the SDL of third-year nursing students

Level of readiness	n	%
Very poor	0	0
Poor	2	3.8
Average	9	17.3
Good	25	48.1
Very good	16	30.8

Meanwhile, most of the final year students (40%, n=21) showed good readiness for SDL, 30% (n=12) students showed average readiness for SDL, 17.5% (n=7) students showed very good readiness for SDL, and only a very small number of students showed poor readiness for SDL.

Table 3: Readiness for the SDL of fourth-year nursing students

Level of readiness	n	%
Very poor	1	2.5
Poor	4	10
Average	12	30
Good	16	40
Very good	7	17.5

When comparing the third and final year nursing students' readiness for SDL, there was no statistically significant difference between year of study (*p-value*: 0.190) and their impacts on SDLR in Nursing students.

Discussion

This study aimed to assess the readiness for SDL among BSc (Hons) Nursing undergraduates in the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The readiness levels of the participants were evaluated in relation to their socio-demographic factors and the sources of information they utilized.

The findings of our research showed a strong positive trend, with nearly 70% of respondents having "Good" or "Very good" readiness, and only 6.5% of students expressed their readiness as poor. Approximately 23% had an "Average" readiness for SDL. Similar results were found in another study, where 78.73% had a high degree

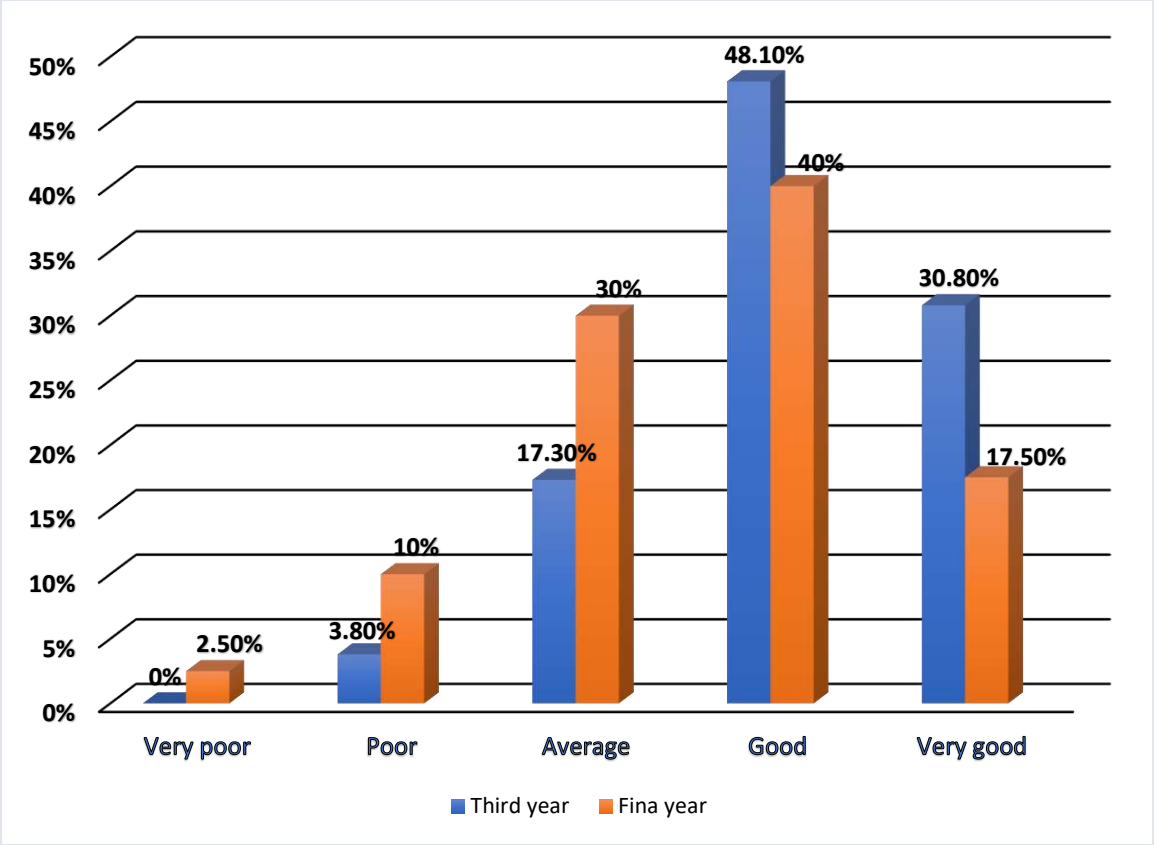

Figure 1: Nursing students' readiness for SDL

of readiness for SDL. Additionally, the lowest percentage (2.65%) of the respondents had a poor level of SDLR, while 18.62% of them had a moderate level (Adel et al., 2024).

According to the study results, there was no statistically significant difference in SDL scores between the genders of the students. Similar results were found in a study conducted in Sri Lanka. The results expressed that none of the measured sociodemographic factors, including gender, were found to be associated with SDL (Vaau et al., 2022). Another study found that the SDL readiness scores of male and female students differed statistically significantly. Compared to female students, male students scored lower on a readiness scale (Örs, 2018). Moreover, no statistically significant difference was found between academic year and SDL readiness in this present study. A study conducted by Meng et al., (2019b) also found no correlation between academic year and SDL readiness.

The current study does not examine the association between the effect of time management and SDL. Similarly, the relationship between the effect of metacognition and SDL is also not addressed in our study. A study conducted to evaluate the effect of metacognition and SDL readiness on the learning performance of BSc(Hons) Nursing graduates revealed a significant relationship between SDL and metacognition (Kim, 2024). Also, a study conducted in 2018 found that a moderate positive correlation exists between SDL readiness and time management values(Ertug & Faydali, 2018). Therefore, this study recommends that future studies could be carried out to evaluate the relationship between the above factors in SDL.

Conclusion

This research aimed to find out the readiness of BSc (Hons) Nursing undergraduates for SDL within the Faculty of Health-Care Sciences at Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The majority of students exhibited good to very good readiness for SDL, indicating a positive trend toward embracing student-centered learning approaches. Approximately 70% demonstrated good or very good readiness, with no significant difference between third and final years or between genders. The study also identified that while many students are prepared for SDL, a minority still

show poor readiness, emphasizing the need for targeted support to enhance SDL skills and confidence.

The findings of the current research highlight the necessity of providing focused guidance and support to promote students' SDL ability. By promoting SDLR among the undergraduate students, educators can prepare them with a lifelong learning and professional development ability to more effectively utilize in healthcare settings and provide the best patient care. The study findings give suggestions for designing the curriculum and suggest the importance of facilitating independent learning to improve student outcomes.

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