

Self-Directed Learning in Higher Education in Sri Lanka: Challenges in Implementing Policy

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Abstract

Human beings are entering into a strange new world in which rapid change will be the only stable characteristic. In this context, self-directed learning (SDL) is recognized as a desirable goal in tertiary education as it is found to comply with learner-centered approaches and enables students to navigate the changes and minimize the risks they face. Sri Lanka has also realized this need to introduce SDL to the university system and several policy initiatives have been taken in this regard. The main objectives of this paper are to examine the policy initiatives introduced and identify the feasibility and the challenges in implementing them. For this purpose, data were collected using a mixed mode design. Findings revealed that several policy initiatives have been taken to promote SDL among the undergraduates in the Sri Lankan universities. The majority of the undergraduates have positive attitudes toward SDL, and they showed willingness to be self-directed learners. However, the majority of the academics were skeptical about SDL due to the challenges they foresee. Examination-oriented educational methods, ineffective assessment techniques, excessive numbers of students enrolled in courses, inadequacy of time and traditional practices of the lecturers are identified as obstacles to develop SDL in the Sri Lankan universities.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, teacher-directed learning, undergraduate education

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Introduction

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

The concept of SDL became part of an international discourse on education after Malcom Knowles proposed the comprehensive theory on adult education called ‘Andragogy’ in 1968 (Knowles, 1968). As a result, the concept of SDL was mainly associated with the adult education principles that were introduced from time to time by scholars in the field of adult education. However, this concept is examined from different perspectives and hence has many definitions. For this paper, SDL is defined as an approach where learners take the responsibility and collaborative control over their learning process with an internal motivation to achieve the expected outcomes of the given programs or courses.

There have been claims in adult education literature that adults’ greatest learning need is to learn for and by themselves instead of relying on someone else to provide them with information and direct their learning.

For learning itself is necessarily autonomous, that is, self-directed: it is constituted by interest, commitment, understanding and practice. Each of these self-generated-they are negated or distorted by any attempt to instill or impose them (Heron, no date, cited in Leach, 2000)

As Dewey (1938) states that education works best when it concentrates on thinking and understanding, rather than on rote memorization. Therefore, new educational model which concentrates on learning how to think and understand should be introduced.

In addition to the above, when the demands and challenges of the present socio-economic context are taken into consideration, SDL should be a common approach on the teaching learning process that should be practiced at different levels for all learners in every educational institution. For example, the proliferation of knowledge and information due to the expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) in this century has changed the educational landscape. This change, in the one hand, has created new challenges for the individual lives and, on the other, aided in the creation of a plethora of new opportunities for learning. As a result of this knowledge explosion, human being is faced with the first-hand experiences that nobody has experienced before. In this challenging context, every individual in this era should be a life-long learner as well as autonomous to understand the world around them.

In such a context, there is a great need for a change of educational practices used in educational institutions of a country. Yet, it seems to be that the higher education institutes in Sri Lanka still continue to follow the same conventional education practices developed by behavioral design. The aim of this paper is to examine the policy initiatives which were introduced relating to the SDL and identify the feasibility and the challenges in implementing them in higher education in Sri Lanka.

SDL and the students of higher education

University students, as a higher order thinking group of a country, are expected to possess many attributes such as independent and critical thinking, problem solving skills, inventive thinking, collaborative learning, effective communication, high productivity to compete in the present global economy. Accordingly, the accepted fundamental principles of higher education, personal autonomy, personal responsibility, and personal growth which develop the above attributes should be highlighted (Wilcox, 1996). Further, Wilcox (1996) stresses that since the SDL provides a platform for the students to take the responsibility in their learning, SDL is suited for higher education to achieve one of its roles: i.e 'Universities must produce graduates who are self-directed learners'.

The World Bank Report (2009) also stresses that Sri Lanka's future in the global knowledge economy of the twenty first century depends critically on the country's intellectual and human capital. The ability of people to think and act creatively, work industriously and productively, and innovate and adapt available technologies to strengthen economic activities is cardinal important to achieve the demands of the knowledge economy.

Having considered this issue in the higher education system in Sri Lanka, various initiatives such as curriculum reforms, introduction of authentic assessment techniques and outcome-based learning have been introduced with a view to addressing the above issues. Among those initiatives, the introduction of Sri Lanka qualification framework (SLQF) can be highlighted. The SLQF identifies the following graduate attributes that the holders of an SLQF level 6 qualification (four-year honours degree) should have

- construct and sustain arguments
- solve problems using appropriate ideas and techniques in a professional context
- demonstrate a thorough and systematic understanding of core aspects of the subject of study
- accurately use the established techniques of analysis within that discipline
- clearly communicate information, ideas, issues, problems, and solutions to specialist, as well as non-specialist, audiences
- (be) ready to exercise initiative
- identify situations they need support from others; and,
- carry out further training and manage own learning.

(SLQF, 2012, p.17).

The above initiations have proved that the need for a significant change of the practices in the humanities and social sciences disciplines of the higher education institutions has been identified by the relevant authorities and various efforts have been taken at the national as well as the university level to respond to the existing social criticism of the graduates who are produced by the universities.

Reflections of the experiences acquired from the current practice in state universities in Sri Lanka, indicate that making changes in the content of the programs alone is not adequate or sufficient to produce a graduate with expected attributes. It is of utmost importance to practice an effective delivery method (process) as well as inculcate in the graduates the expected attributes which have been decided based on the curriculum. Therefore, there is a need to conduct constructive and comprehensive studies to suggest the changes that should be made in the existing process.

Objectives

This paper is based on a study to critically examine the feasibility of introducing self-directed learning (SDL) as opposed to teacher-directed learning which is presently used as the delivery method mostly in humanities and social sciences courses. Accordingly, the following two are the objectives the study.

Examine the policy procedures that have been taken to promote SDL in state universities in Sri Lanka.

Explore the obstacles to promote SDL in humanities and social science courses in the state universities

Literature review

Perceptions on SDL

The literature related to SDL highlights two main arguments. Such literature presents SDL as a process and a personal attribute. Those who interpret SDL as a process are concerned with the degree of autonomy and learner control over organizing the teaching learning process. Consequently, SDL is considered as,

a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p.18).

According to Garrison (1997), (as cited in Kohns and Poton, 2006), the process of accepting responsibility also means to construct meaning and cognitively monitor the learning process itself. As they further asserted responsibility for self-monitoring reflects a commitment and obligation to construct meaning through critical reflection and collaborative confirmation. This interpretation emphasize that responsibility and self-monitoring are key components of SDL.

Those who interpret SDL as a personal attribute identify SDL as the learner's motivation for and capacity to take responsibility for their own learning (Garrison, 1997). According to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), SDL refers to the notion of self-directedness as a personal attribute or characteristic in learners. Guglielmino (1977), Kasworm (1988), Brockett and

Hiemstra (1991) point out that the learner's responsibility is the cornerstone of self-direction in learning.

When analyzing the conceptual interpretations of SDL mentioned above, it is evident that SDL cannot be considered as a mere process or an attribute. According to the understanding of SDL as a process, the availability of autonomy and a learner-controlled environment in the teaching learning process are not sufficient for self-directedness. The learner's motivation and capacity to assume responsibility for their learning (attributes) are critical factors in SDL. Therefore, SDL may be conceptualized as a combination of *process* and *attribute*. With only one aspect of these present, there would be no SDL. In other words, the function of the process depends on personal attributes.

Factors to be considered in developing SDL

The psychological variables such as interest, personality characteristics of emotional stability, independence, super ego, strength, sensitivity and conscientiousness directly influence self-directedness of students whereas social and demographic variables have an indirect influence. (de Bruin, 2007; Lounsbury, Levy, Park, Gibson, & Smith, 2009 as cited in Francis & Flanigan, 2012). According to Blumber (2000, as cited in Yeng-Sze & Hussain, 2010), in an instructional context, self-directed learning means that students are able to take initiative, with or without the teacher, in making decisions concerning their own learning. Teaching methods such as problem-based, case-based learning are shown to develop self-directed learning skills.

As Zimmerman (1998) states, learning as a proactive activity requiring self-initiated motivational and behavioural process as well as meta-cognitive ones. According to Knowles (1990) individuals demonstrating higher levels of meta-cognitive awareness and self-directed learning readiness are more likely to become successful independent learners. The SDL process involves determining a task to complete or a problem to solve, deciding on the necessary steps to take, finding resources to use in the learning process, maintaining attention toward learning activities, and making necessary adjustments within the learning process (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Knowles, 1975).

Learners need skills such as goal setting, metacognition, mistake detection, perfection (choosing appropriate tasks for learning) and reflection (Flavell, 1979, Meichenbaum & Biemiler, 1998, Van Merriënboer & Sluijsmans, 2009) in order to become self-directed learners. But, the teaching learning process that often occurs in these courses had not often contributed adequately to provide these skills for the students. For instance, learning activities, learning resources, learning steps and their adjustments are often decided by the lecturer whereas very limited opportunities are given to the students to set goals, choose learning activities, reflect on performance, and detect learning mistakes.

When the current teaching and learning methods practiced in formal education spectrum for developing SDL skills today were examined, it was identified that most of the methods

were focused on increasing the capacity of students to direct their own learning process through practice (Merriam et al., 2007). However, in planning and implementing the educational activities in formal education setting for fostering SDL skills of the students, it should be realized that fostering SDL skills are not mere reduction of the amount of support and guidance given to students in the teaching learning process. They are also guiding processes which provide opportunity to students to take control of the learning situation and leading them to achieve the expected outcomes as the result of their own effort.

As McCarthy (2013) states, reflection and meta-cognition seemed to work in conjunction with the other and became the primary components of the SDL course as students reflected on their personal development as well as their learning progress. A secondary component was to help students contextualize reflective practices to future endeavours beyond university life. The course therefore required students to be attuned to themselves as individuals: to understand their current strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to reflective transition between classroom experiences and real-life experiences.

SDL and Higher Education

Douglass and Morris (2014) point out three main factors that helped or hindered their self-directed learning; they are student-controlled, faculty-controlled, and administration-controlled facilitators and barriers to SDL. They further classified the key dimensions that come under each factor.

Students who are seen as proactive with other students in the class and outside of class have good study habits. Being proactive in the classroom means actively participating in classes, while being proactive with other students means involvement in student organizations, networking with other students, and forming outside study groups. These factors effectively contribute toward promoting self-directed learning (Yazedjian et al., 2008, and Kuh et al., 2005, as cited in Douglass and Morris, 2014).

The following three dimensions are identified under the faculty-controlled facilitators and barriers that helped or hindered their self-directed learning within faculty control:

- (1) Class structure with attendance policies and clear and relevant grading structure.
- (2) Curriculum design with job shadowing opportunities and independent projects; and,
- (3) Professorial attitudes/traits, including faculty advising and support, use of real-world experiences, and professorial enthusiasm.

Infrastructure and resources, incentives for student involvement in directing their own learning processes and undertaking self-assessment are identified as administration-controlled facilitators and barriers to SDL.

Douglass and Morris (2014) further mention that although universities can provide extrinsic motivation to students, such as grades and a positive campus environment, it may be more important to determine ways to empower students to direct their own learning process. Clearly, when students are intrinsically motivated to succeed, they will perform better in high-cognitive tasks. Furthermore, instructors' or academics' attitudes and class structures can promote students' intrinsic motivation. Similarly, when students feel instructors believe in their abilities, they often are more motivated to achieve their targets.

Methodology

The Survey design under descriptive method was adopted in this study where interviews and a questionnaire were used to collect data in order to get a clear and overall idea about the various aspects such as policies, obstacles related to the SDL. Survey method is most applicable for this purpose because there is the possibility to get the maximum participation from the participants for the study. In keeping with the objectives of this study, the survey method was most suited to obtain sufficient data related to above aspects.

Sample

Considering the nature of the required data, it was decided to select three categories of sample units comprising policy makers, academics, and undergraduates from the University Grant Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka and the University of Colombo. The reason for selecting a sample of UGC policy makers for the study was mainly to examine the policies related to SDL and determine the barriers to implementing these policies. The Faculties of Arts and Education of the University of Colombo were selected as the operational sample units to explore ways of implementing the SDL policies identifying individuals perceptions on SDL.

Accordingly, the total number of the study sample was 166 comprising three categories of sample units breaking down as 3 policy makers, 25 academics, and 138 undergraduates, respectively. Undergraduate sample was selected from the second year students of the Faculties of Arts and Education representing 40% of the total number of students from each department of the Faculty of Arts. Forty percent of the total number of the sample of the second year students was from the Faculty of Education.

Data gathering

Data were collected using a mixed research design. In order to identify the policy initiatives, policy documents were perused through a qualitative content analysis. In order to identify the feasibility in implementing and identify obstacles, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of undergraduates of Arts and Education Faculties of the University of Colombo. Interviews were held with a smaller sample of undergraduates and academics. Three policy makers from the University Grants Commission and the Ministry of Higher Education were also interviewed.

Analysis of data

Qualitative methods such as documentary and thematic analyses were used to interpret data concerning both policy procedures and academic perspectives pertaining to the SDL in the higher education system in Sri Lanka. At the same time, quantitative methods were also used to interpret data related to the opportunities that are available in the teaching learning process for the undergraduates in order to engage in SDL. The challenges that undergraduates encounter in developing SDL skills were also elucidated through statistical analytical methods.

Results

Policy procedures

A credit system has been introduced under the SLQF in order to encourage SDL by Ministry of Higher Education. In SLQF credit system, it has been proposed that for every one hour of lectures, a student is expected to carry out at least 2-21/2 additional hours of independent learning. It means students have to use a minimum 90 additional hours or a maximum 113 additional hours of independent learning for a course unit in a given semester. For every 2 hours of laboratory studies, a student is expected carry out at least 1 additional hour of independent studies. Policy makers explain that these credits have to be earned after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of learning outcomes. In the SLQF, one finds 10 levels of qualifications such as certificate, advanced certificate, diploma, and higher diploma and under these levels ‘developing SDL skills’ have been identified as a main outcome that should be achieved in each of these levels. For example, students must demonstrate self-direction and confidence in solving problems as well as skills of independent learning for continuous professional development.

With the purpose of producing graduates with necessary attributes, a module to implement the outcome-based education (OBE) using SDL in Sri Lankan universities has been introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education in collaboration with the World Bank. Through this module, an effort has been taken to encourage SDL in the higher education context in Sri Lanka.

Although, in this manual the term ‘Student-Centred Learning (SCL)’ is used instead of SDL, when the definition given for the SCL is concerned, it is very similar to the definition of SDL given elsewhere in this paper. In this manual SCL is defined as a teaching and learning process where students learn by actively engaging in and interacting with the study material, guided by a teacher, so that the students will construct a long lasting and deep understanding of the study material.

This initiative can be interpreted as an important effort in shifting from teacher-directed learning (TDL) to SDL. It could contribute to inculcate the SDL skills in the graduates who are required to cope with the present socio-economic situations. It was revealed from the

interviews held with the policymakers that academics and the undergraduates have a very vital role to play to bring these policy procedures into realities. In this case, academics are accountable to develop a learning culture among the undergraduates (instead of a teaching culture) wherein both academics and the undergraduates must take the responsibility to undertake their work based on the principle 'how to learn'.

In addition, in order to promote the SDL in the higher education institutes, SDL has been mentioned in the strategic plan for the year 2015 by Ministry of Higher Education as a main goal that should be achieved. For example, the University of Colombo has allocated Rs. 25 million for this purpose in their annual budget.

Academic perspectives on the barriers to achieving the expected learning attributes and SDL skills

To ensure whether students are achieve the expected graduate attributes and demonstrate SDL skills in their higher education, I posed the following question to academics:

“Do you think that the expected graduate attributes are being achieved through the present practices of the humanities and social sciences?”

The preponderant answer was “no”; a few lecturers of the sample said, “to some extent”. It is very significant that only two lecturers answered in the affirmative.

Then I inquired the reasons for their answer in order to understand the factors that have prevented students from achieving the expected graduate attributes. Some of the stated reasons are given below (L refers to lecturer).

- L5:** “Students and lecturers are taxed with heavy workloads “due to the semester system, while lecturers are trying to complete their curriculum, students are trying to complete a number of assignments within the given short period of time. So, they do not have time to creatively use their own imagination”. Students require freedom and sufficient time to internalize what they learn. However, the present system and its practices do not support achievement of the expected outcomes.
- L2:** “We are still practicing teacher-centred methods”.
- L3:** “Teacher-centred education is the reason”.
- L1:** “Even though we have clearly identified the attributes that should be achieved by our students, the present curriculum does not support students to achieve these”.

According to the academics' views given above, the semester system, teacher-centred delivery methods, and a mismatch between the curriculum and its intended objectives have become major barriers to learners' actual achievement of the expected attributes.

As revealed in the literature review, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation greatly influence the development of SDL skills in students. Based on this, the next question asked was,

“Do you think that the present teaching-learning environment supports the development of SDL skills in the learner?”

Similar to the first question, a majority of lecturers responded “no”, with the rest of the sample stating “to some extent”. None of the lecturers of the sample gave affirmative answers. Some of the views supporting these answers are as follows:

- L2:** “The existing academic environment in the humanities and social sciences mostly encourages teacher-directed learning rather than student-directed learning. The major reasons for this are: the large number of students in a class; poor student interaction in the teaching learning process; insufficient time; and, ineffective evaluation methods”.
- L1:** “It’s a time-consuming process. But lecturers have no time to support and direct the students toward self-directed learning due to their heavy workload”.
- L10:** “The allocated time frame for a semester is not sufficient to move toward SDL. Fifteen weeks are allocated for a semester, and it is difficult to have high expectations of SDL within short time frames, because it takes some students more time to get use to that style of teaching. An examination-oriented education system discourages the promotion of an SDL environment. Academics who attempt to promote SDL are often faced with initial resistance from some students who are very protective of their role: they expect to be lectured as a result of the examination-oriented education system.”
- L14:** “I agree that the traditional TDL approach should be shifted toward student-centred learning, if the goal is effective learning. However, I am forced into traditional TDL methods by the current education system of university education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. In this teaching-learning environment, students are provided very limited opportunity in the classroom to interact with each other in order to share subject knowledge and seek clarification from the lecturer because of the large numbers of students in the class, as well as the nature of the delivery method. A more conducive environment is required to develop the SDL skills of students”.
- L18:** “The current teaching-learning environment is oriented in the teacher’s direction and does not create the platform for collaborative learning and independent thinking. Also, the teacher takes the whole responsibility where the students themselves should be taking responsibility in the teaching-learning process. Most of the time, students passively participate in the lecture. Therefore, this system does not help achieve the expected attributes and SDL skills”.

Accordingly, it is evident that present teaching learning environment does not support to develop the SDL skills of students in higher education in Sri Lanka.

In addition to the above reasons, the researcher realized during discussions with lecturers that academics’ traditional beliefs are a major obstacle for promoting SDL in these institutions and fields. Those observations are given below.

- Most academics still believe that knowledge can be transmitted through a simple, linear, almost behaviouristic, communication process.
- Most academics are reluctant to let go of their control of the class because they are uncertain of their own handling of the class.
- Academics are not enthusiastic about adopting more interactive techniques in their lectures.
- Most academics do not have an accurate assessment of undergraduate potentialities and, therefore, they have negative attitudes about student learning.
- Academics are not willing to take the necessary collective effort to shift from the existing paradigm but maintain the existing system.

According to my observations and reflections, the current academic environment and culture in the fields of humanities and social sciences in Sri Lankan higher education institutes fail to encourage undergraduates to develop SDL skills. Consequently, students have adopted to cope with the current system. Academics should be responsible for establishing and maintaining an SDL-friendly culture in these institutions.

Barriers to developing SDL: Undergraduate perspectives

As discussed previously, undergraduates state that they are quite ready for SDL. Considering this finding, the question remains as to why this undergraduate readiness toward SDL is not utilized in the teaching learning process. On the other hand, students who claim to be ready for SDL, are not recognized by academics. Undergraduate responses to the question, “Do you have the opportunity and freedom to interact with the teaching-learning process?”, in the undergraduate questionnaire suggest solutions to some extent in this regard. Their responses are given below in table 1.

Table 1

Opportunity to interact with the teaching-learning process

Opportunity	Frequency	Percentage
Always	44	31.9
Sometimes	75	54.3
Rarely	18	13.1
Not at all	1	.7
Total	138	100.0

According to the above responses, while 68% of the respondents state that they do not constantly get the opportunity to interact with the teaching learning process. Thirty two percent of the sample says that they always get the opportunity to interact. This reveals that a majority of the undergraduates of the sample generally participate in the teaching-learning process as passive listeners. This means that undergraduates do not have a learning environment to promote and practice their SDL skills.

The subsequent question in the undergraduate questionnaire, “*What are the teaching methods most used by academics in the teaching-learning process?*” was asked in order to further clarify the finding revealed from above table. Undergraduate responses are given in table 2 below.

Table 2

Most-used methods by academics

Lecture Method	Frequency	Percentage
No Response	20	14.5
Lecture	112	81.2
Group	4	2.9
Question & Answer	1	.7
Brainstorming	1	.7
Total	138	100.0

According to a large percentage (81.2%) of the sample, the lecture method is predominantly used in the teaching learning process. As a result, undergraduates get minimal opportunity to interact with the teaching learning process. Significantly, a considerable percentage (14.5%) of the sample has not responded to this question. It is further revealed from the above responses that there is very minimal tendency on the part of academics to use teaching methods that cultivate SDL skills.

According to the findings in above table, the absence of opportunities to interact with the teaching-learning process has been a major barrier to cultivating undergraduate SDL skills and to creating an SDL environment in the humanities and social sciences.

Challenges to developing self-directed learning

Challenges that students face in developing SDL skills are shown graphically in Figure 1 given below.

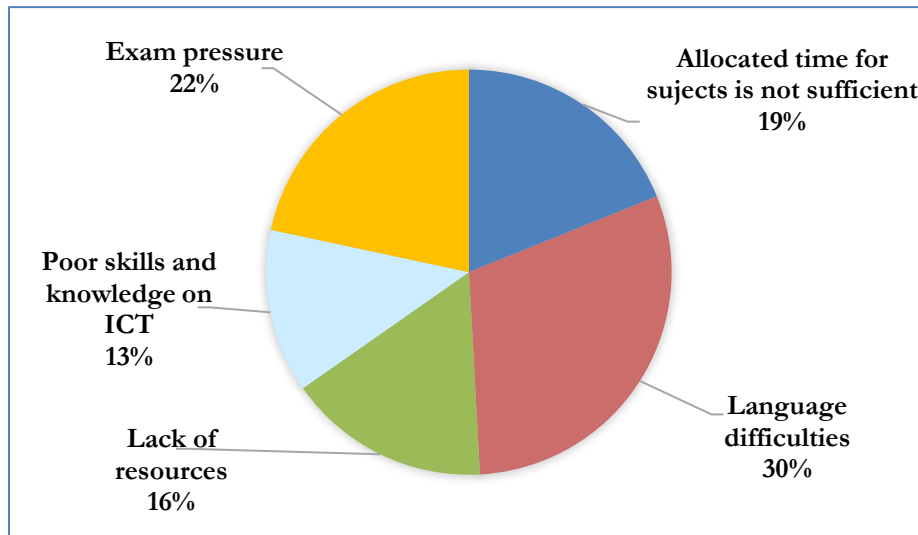


Figure 1: Challenges to develop self-directed learning

Language difficulties (30%), examination pressure (22%), and insufficient allocation of time for subjects (19%) are highlighted as barriers to developing undergraduate SDL skills. However, only 25% of the sampled undergraduates gave relevant reasons in this regard. Consequently, the irrelevant reasons will not be major challenges from a student perspective if a proper mechanism/system is introduced for students to follow.

The allocated time frame for a semester is not sufficient to move toward SDL. Fifteen weeks have been allocated for each semester, and it is difficult to have higher expectations of SDL with shorter time frames because it takes for some students more time to get used to that style of teaching. It is difficult to progress from teacher to student directed learning especially for the first year students as they are used to a teacher directed style of teaching in schools.

Examination-oriented education system discourages promoting SDL environment. Academics who attempt to promote SDL are often faced with initial resistance from some students who are very protective of their role. They are by products of TDL and an examination-oriented education system.

Students stated that they had very limited opportunity in the classroom to interact with each other in order to share the subject knowledge and clarify uncertain areas from the

lecturer on subject matter because of the large numbers of students in the class as well as the nature of the delivery method. Majority of the sample stressed that examination-oriented system and semester system had been major issues that hinder free thinking and learning. These systems have prevented the students from collaborative learning and independent thinking.

Most of the lecturers mostly practiced TDL approaches in the classrooms as their delivery method. According to their views, they were practicing traditional TDL approaches because they had to cover a heavy workload within a very limited time. Therefore, practicing SDL approaches with time constraints was difficult.

Conclusions and suggestions

Various national institutions, appointed to enhance the quality of higher education (such as the Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Academy in the UK; the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in India, and the Malaysian Qualification Framework) have mandated the nurturing of SDL as a fundamental objective. Similarly, the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka has taken various policy initiatives to promote an SDL environment in the higher education system to shape productive graduates. In comparison with other countries, the policies and procedures recommended in the SLQF by the Ministry of Higher Education and the University Grants Commission are sufficient to promote a culture of SDL in higher education in Sri Lanka.

Outcome-based education, the credit system, and the K-SAM (K – knowledge, S – skills, A- attitudes, M – mind-set) model are important policies in this regard. Developing SDL skills (such as the capacity for self-direction and confidence in solving problems, as well as independent learning for continuous professional development is a main outcome at each level of qualification introduced in the SLQF. However, the findings of this research reveal that these policies are not practiced adequately at the institutional level for various reasons such as negative attitudes among academics, lack of time, large numbers of undergraduates in courses/classrooms, and an examination-oriented system. The SLQF recommends teaching methods to ensure the expected outcomes at each level of qualification in the SLQF. These methods advocate student-centered learning which leads to SDL in the higher education system as a policy decision. However, these proposed methods/policy decisions are not adequately implemented in the teaching-learning process, and TDL remains the dominant method of delivery in the humanities and social sciences.

The theoretical and research bases in the literature review of this study stated that SDL can be a reality within a student-directed or student-centered learning environment where students actively take part in activities and assume responsibilities in the teaching learning process. An SDL environment creates the platform for achieving the expected graduate attributes recommended in the SLQF.

Even though the current educational practices in the humanities and social sciences have not encouraged undergraduate development of SDL skills, it is significant that most academics do not make much effort to practice the interactive teaching methods that can support learners. Consequently, students do not have opportunities to interact with the teaching learning process. The results of this study revealed that most of the undergraduates confirm the above reality.

As discussed above, while undergraduates confirm that they have high confidence and readiness for SDL, lecturers do not endorse their students' perspectives. It is very clear that this contradiction has become a major barrier in cultivating SDL skills and the expected learning attributes of undergraduates in humanities and social sciences. In order to successfully implement SDL policy in Sri Lanka, the perceptions of academics and students need to change.

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