

# Cultivating Self-Directed Learning in Malaysian Higher Education: A Qualitative Inquiry

Ahmad Azmi Abdel Hamid Esmail<sup>1</sup>, Peter Voo<sup>2</sup>, Ismail Maakip<sup>3\*</sup>, Balan Rathakrishnan<sup>4</sup>, Murnizam Halik<sup>5</sup>, Sanen Marshall<sup>6</sup>, Dg Norizah Binti Ag Kiflee<sup>7</sup>, Norzihan Ayub<sup>8</sup>, Bavani Arumugam<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5,7,8</sup>Faculty of Psychology and Education, University Malaysia Sabah, <sup>6,9</sup>Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, University Malaysia Sabah  
Email: ahmad\_azmi\_bp21@iluv.ums.edu.my, peter@ums.edu.my, daeng@ums.edu.my, balan@ums.edu.my, mzam@ums.edu.my, Sanen@ums.edu.my, dndz@ums.edu.my, norzihan@ums.edu.my, bavani@ums.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/19226>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/19226

**Published Online:** 20 January 2024

## Abstract

Higher education institutions are increasingly moving away from traditional, lecture-centric teaching methods towards more student-driven approaches. This study delves into the promotion and application of self-directed learning in the Malaysian context. Through a qualitative research approach, we interviewed four lecturers and thirteen students from a specific Malaysian public university. The grounded theory was employed to analyze the data. Our findings indicate that fostering self-directed learning necessitates cultivating specific attitudes and behaviours in both students and the broader higher-education establishment. Students should be encouraged to find purpose in their lives, transition from a fear-based mindset to a critically assertive one, and embrace a sense of academic freedom. Conversely, lecturers need to refine their teaching methods by offering clearer explanations, adjusting their attitudes, and enhancing assessment techniques. Additionally, the system should grant lecturers greater flexibility in syllabus design and additional time for pedagogical development. A collaborative effort among lecturers, students, and policymakers is essential to embed self-directed learning in Malaysian universities

**Keywords:** Self Directed Learning, Educational, Student Centered, Qualitative

The educational front is witnessing a shift from teacher-centered learning toward student-centered. This is due to the globalization demand for better skilled and competitive employees. Because of this, it is necessary for educational institutions like universities to encourage students to engage in self-directed learning (Morris, 2019). In the current article, we investigate how self-directed learning can be promoted, especially in the Asian context, by exploring students' and lecturers' perceptions.

**Introduction**

Self-directed learning is characterized by students who take responsibility in their learning and identify their learning needs (and gap), decide their learning path, and can evaluate their progress (Knowles, 1977). However, others provide more comprehensive models that consider the social and cultural aspects of self-directed learning.

For example, Brockett and Hiemstra present self-directed learning as an interaction between three main dimensions, which are: person (which is related to individual characteristics like self-efficacy, intelligence, and motivation), process (teaching and learning transactions such as organizing and goal setting), context refers to the environment and socio-political climate and culture (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2012). Moreover, Long believe that self-directed learning requires students to be psychologically prepared to take responsibility for their learning. Otherwise, just providing a student with the freedom to choose their learning (which long refer to as pedagogical dimensions) may not guarantee that students would be self-directed learners (Long et al., 1989).

One of the reasons for adopting self-directed learning is due to its connection with deep-level processing (a concept that refers to the individual tendency to seek the underlying principle and to be able to elaborate and explain what they learn (Trigwell & Prosser, 1991), life-long learning, academic achievement, developing critical thinking, self-efficacy and reducing procrastination tendency among student (Abdi Zarrin et al., 2020; Cazan & Schiopca, 2014; Hsu & Shiue, 2005; Kek & Huijser, 2011; Khalid et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2016; Loyens et al., 2008; Ramamurthy et al., 2019; San et al., 2016; Sew Kim & Nainee Tan Soon Aun, 2018; Tekkol & Demirel, 2018; Turan & Koç, 2018).

However, various personal and contextual factors can affect the promotion of self-directed learning, such as motivation, self-efficacy, self-reflection, self-concept of academics, learning attitude, interest in learning, openness to learning, emotional intelligence, age, IQ, self-esteem, wisdom, emotional stability, internal locus of control, sense of coherence, life satisfaction, commitment, confidence, and cultural values can influence student-centred learning. Furthermore, studies have shown that authoritative teachers who do not accept student's opinion can inhibit student's autonomy and that sociocultural factors such as shyness, respect for wiser individuals, and the role of a face-keeping attitude can also impact student-centered learning. Finally, some studies have reported that the Malaysian and Pakistani contexts have additional barriers such as curriculum overload, and difficulty for teachers to change from being knowledge experts to facilitators (Boyer et al., 2013; Cazan & Schiopca, 2014; du Toit-Brits & van Zyl, 2017; Ramli et al., 2018; Saeid & Eslaminejad, 2017; Siddiqui et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2021; Zhoc et al., 2018)

Previous studies investigating self-directed have mostly been conducted using quantitative methods. Few studies used qualitative methods, especially in the Asian context. This study aims to understand how we could promote self-directed learning among university students, especially in Asian and Malaysian contexts.

**Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research method, as it aligns best with our research objectives and enables an in-depth exploration of student and lecturer perceptions regarding the research phenomena (Creswell, 2018). Data collection was carried out using both purposive and convenience sampling techniques. We utilized semi-structured interview guidelines to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

The study includes seventeen research participants, which consisted of 4 lecturers, and 13 students. Seven students were interviewed individually. While the rest conducted using a focus group approach. Each focus group consisted of three students. For more information regarding participants information. Please refer to Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participants' Profile*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Lecturer 1	Faculty of Computing and Informatics	female
Lecturer 2	Education and psychology	female
Lecturer 3	Liberal sciences	male
Lecturer 4	Education and psychology	female
Students 1	Education and psychology	female
Students 2	Education and psychology	female
Students 3	Education and psychology	male
Students 4	Faculty of Engineering	male
Students 5	Education and psychology	Female
Students 6	Education and psychology	Female
Students 7	Education and psychology	female
Focus group 1 (consists of 3)	All from Education Psychology	female
Focus group 2 (consists of 3)	All from Education Psychology	female

This study employs an objectivist grounded theory approach to analyze the transcription. Which posits the existence of objective truth. However, the theory denies the possibility of fully grasping the nuances of reality. However, the main aim of this approach is to explain the "causes, conditions, contexts, contingencies, consequences, and covariance" of the social process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Coşkun, 2020).

We employed Atlas.ti version 23 for data analysis. Our process began with a thorough review of the transcriptions, followed by detailed line-by-line coding. After refining the codes, similar data were consolidated, and any irrelevant data were removed. Ultimately, this led to the identification of main themes and sub-themes, which we presented in a coherent manner.

### **Findings**

Below are the findings based on the data collected. The main themes of the study are: developing students' determinations and enhancing the institution of higher education.

Table 2

*Themes and Sub-themes of the study*

Themes	Sub-themes
Developing students' determination	Purpose Mentality Freedom
Enhancing the institution of higher education	teaching method Lecturers attitude Theory and practice Lecturers' life

**Theme 1: Developing students**

In self-determinations theory, human motivation consists of three main components: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Based on this theory, the more we develop these aspects among individuals, the more they will be motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2012). And one of the main issues students realize is related to the purpose of why students come to the university in the first place. For example, student 4 believes that many students come to the university under social pressure or to achieve their parents' desire.

*"I think, just there is always emphasis, this pressure on student [that] after high school they must get the degree. and is just the objective is getting the degree, it does not mean that you need to be the best at it. if you get the degree, I mean is kind of like a title. is not like: Oh, you have 4 pointers!" (Student 4)*

*"Or their dreams that are interested in it that they are willing to scarify their time, the things that they love, that give them joy, that they need to scarify to achieve that goal in life which most of the time is their parent's dream. but they do not have a choice. they want to make their parents happy so they achieve their parent's dream for them. So, it is not their dream actually" (Student 4)*

In other words, pursuing a degree for many students may not come from their desire. Instead, they just consider it part of the social requirements to get a good job. And that can explain why many students are mainly considering getting a degree. Or, at best, performing well in their evaluation. Some research participants noted the last point we mentioned in a different context.

*"I mean that is great. is a bounce if you got 4 pointer or first-class degree, but if you get, you graduate with a degree does not matter you have a first-class or not" (Student 4)*

*"I guess in this culture its mostly about getting a pass instead striving for an A. I guess, its, I do not know what the term is, in Malay is called cukup cukup makan sahaja. it is like, if you pass it is okay for you. I guess, you do not have" (Student 1)*

*"But most of them, they only looking to their academic evaluation just to full-fill the stages" (lecture 2)*

*"Maybe before they come to the university, since achieving certain grades that is the way to achieve their admission that is why" (Lecture 2)*

Other students note that many undergraduates are only concerned with playing and enjoying their time. For student 2, many students' souls are mainly concerned with playing and enjoying. Similar ideas were also noted by other students and lecturers.

*"Because the majority of our students are 19, 20, 21. in that time they are much more. they Soule want to enjoy. even they come to university they go to shopping mall every weekend, assignment due date last minute" (Student 2)*

*"I think most of them are 20, 21,23 and they do not want to miss out, I guess, on the experience that I experience with young people. because young people they want to have, when they still young they want to have fun, they want to experience a flow, something new"* (Student 4)

*"For me in my opinion what students usually do. Typically, student would like to play more than study. So, to be honest, to be completely honest with you. I also do that. sometimes I enjoy more than study."* (Student 3)

*"The existing is they comfort zone, they are comfort in the situation nowadays, I go to the, I am not worried, because I am living in a comfort, okay I have my parents, I still have my home, so they need to make they know their responsibilities, know that we are sometimes youngster that like in campus life. try to live your life, try to feel the campus life, so I know that is, youngsters they really love in playing you know. but please make sure while you are playing around your responsibility."* (Lecturer 4)

And that brings the issue of the purpose. As we have seen, students do not have a clear picture regarding what they are doing in their studies. If students do not have a good reason for why they must study, that is like what student 7 points. Then, student 7 again, what would make someone torture himself/herself with studying?

*"Yeah, if they learn about themselves if you just learn anything blindly, then they could not achieve something, and, how to say, nowadays we learn because we think it is a must in our lives, but then, if we think education or anything like skills, how to live without the skills. it is about we ourselves knowing the importance of learning the things."* (Student 7)

*"And most of us they are like happy go lucky, we live in life, just to, what is the purpose of life? why do we want to torture ourselves some people who would think like that. why we do not just do not enjoy ourselves, the purpose of living is to enjoy so why want to torture yourself too much"* (Student 7)

To promote self-directed learning, we must consider helping students develop a reason or purpose that requires them to become self-directed learners. And that purpose needs to be voluntarily identified or integrated by the students. Based on self-determination theory, to develop intrinsic motivation, individuals must identify with their social ambient (meaning to accept it as part of their own) or integrate with it.

That is why student 7 suggests that lecturers must intrigue students to think about what they are doing here? And what is the purpose of their life? in other words, students need more time and chances to reflect on their life. This might be a big challenge for the current generation, who tend to be continuously distracted by their smartphone and entertainment. This partially explains why one lecturer found it hard for the students to express themselves when she gives them a self-reflection assignment. The other parts related that the culture makes them scared to voice their opinion.

*"If I am a lecturer that I am facing 100 students, maybe I will want to ask you them," why you here? Why do you want to study? Why do you live?" and then I want them to ask themselves"* (Student 7)

*"Constant bills and whistles from their apps, causing them to respond to things that are not urgent rather focusing on the long-term objective of their study. We have very distracted young generation, and so are we, adult is very distractive as well. we are also procrastinators, but maybe adults are a bit more aware for what is happening."* (Lecturer 3)

*"Only a few of them who can talk about their experience"* (Lecture 1)

*"But I see student they do not understand that it is easy things to do actually because not everybody can do that probably which writing from, from. how to say that (she exclaims). exploring things inside and sharing what your experience is. they keep just read and give definition of the culture, while I am not asking you give a definition, they were 3 to 4 pages talking about the definitions of the culture"* (Lecturer 1)

*"I think the personality, the way that you brought-up so scared from voicing out your opinion"* (Lecture 1)

And that brings us to the other issue regarding developing their mentality. Based on our findings, respondents note the spoon-feeding tendency among many students. Since they were a child, their teacher or school has given them everything. During their exam, lecturers will provide an objective and fixed schema of questions and answer.

*"I think, since we are in the school, our teacher will give the, I mean the tools that we have to study our teacher will provide, so we will be more dependent on teacher and lecturers like that. So, this our culture since school actually"* (Student 2)

*"You know spooning. For me, spooning one kind of demotivation for student to be self-learner. because everything is given. that is the simple one, spooning."* (Student 5)

*"They need a tailor-made reading, they are looking for exact objective answer and they approach their study very target marks base, I would not even say exam, base, it is marks base"* (Lecturer 3)

Based on our findings, students develop a fear of showing their uniqueness. In other words, they are afraid of expressing their individuality. They have this mentality that makes them afraid to be different. Since they might believe that being different would make them ostracized (as one lecturer expressed). So, to avoid that, they just tend to comply with whatever has been given to them. just following and not asking many things.

*"When they come into the university having already gone through very, what I presume to be very conformist, environment in the schools that is very difficult for the majority to be individualistic."* (Lecturer 3)

*"Fear of being different, fear of being ostracized, fear of being ostracized and treated as the enemy of community,"* (Lecturer 3)

*"No freedom to be who you want to be, to be an individual on campus, always having to be part of the group."* (Lecturer 3)

*"They are being led by a follower personality. follow, just follow and not creating any problem. I think we should not be creating disharmony inside us and to other people"* (Lecture 1)

*"You mean the other way around. So, like what I said we are at the mediocre level. like we just like love to follow. We do not question much so that kind of things I mean. So maybe that affect a little bit on the how people look at this that directed learning. maybe they see to be difficult for them."* (Lecture 1)

To deal with that, we must increase campus freedom space. Specially to think critically. So, students are worried about being punished for expressing their opinion and being critical regarding issues around them.

Both students and lecturers note that such fear has developed since they were a child. One student note that since they were in school, they were not allowed to think too far. Or, as other lecturers express, they have critical thinking inside the box.

*"Yeah, that is true, and the problem even before university, like since we start schooling until now, we have been train not to think too far outside of the box. once you go far but you are still relevant, but will be like stopped that is wrong"* (Focus group 2)

*"Start at very young age, when you internalize the values of do not speak up, I mean the affirmation of lecturers or teacher all the time, I am told what to think in school, I cannot challenge authority" (Lecturer 3)*

*"But critical thinking is the big let-down, because we ourselves do not implemented and we are reluctant to allow the freedom to think. and we do not even, and we do not encourage it. So, I had written on this before, which called critical thinking inside the box" (Lecture 3)*

Another reason why it might be hard to develop critical thinking among university students is that lecturers are not critical thinkers. So how do we expect lecturers to develop something they do not have?

*"Recognize this is a liberal arts center, recognize that people are not meant to be published just in specialist journals with high impact factors, recognize that interdisciplinary papers, take time especially in a country like Malaysia. where the university have been dumped down. badly dumped down, to the point where even lecturers do not think critically" (Lecturer 3)*

However, this freedom must be educated as well. Lecturer 3 notes that providing freedom with no restriction might not be a good thing as well. Instead, students need to be given freedom. At the same time, they need to learn empathy toward their society to ensure their freedom will benefit them and their society.

*"We want freedom, and it is very important, but freedoms come together with education, and education on health, and education on social, or education on empathy, you know. you know so yes, we want to open the flood gate to freedom, but we must think about where the student is now, and how to introduce new environment, more liberal environment, that will make human being empathetic, make them environmentally responsible, make them. responsible on the internet, on the social media" (Lecturer 3)*

Another approach is to develop an environment of healthy enmity. Where students are encouraged to debate and argue with each other. In other words, students would be encouraged to create an enemy they would be respected. Another way providing more chances for debate during the class.

*"But we should create an environment of healthy enmity in class, healthy enemies, healthy enmity, enmity means adversity. meaning, in Malay it sounds nice, (he speaks in Malay). meaning that people are arguing and debating, you know, criticizing each other but it is the only way, to allow society to become individualistic" (Lecturer 1)*

*"I will not ask them what you studied last week. No, let us hear some opinion from them, like having a small debate session. like that, I try to make fun" (Focus Group 2)*

## **Theme 2: Enhancing the Institution of Higher Education**

Almost all Students note that many lecturers all do is read from the slides without elaborating or explaining their course properly. While other lectures would just waste the lecturer's time by chit-chatting with the students. Which is something that reduces their understanding of course material. And subsequently makes them less motivated to study.

*"That is, it, I mean, oh. and we already talk about the elaborative part, they just read endlessly from the slide in a really, long slide, and do not really elaborate further. they do not use keyword, and they do not really elaborate on much and they do not give you a sense of direction of where you are trying a head. they are not giving you a clear picture, maybe they do not discuss the course structure with you. the objective of the course subject you are taking I guess." (Student 1)*

*"And then he meets a lecturer, the lecture teaches the class while he is sitting down, and then just use the laser to point out in the slides, and the slides just this and this and this" (Student 4)*

*"mem3: "we won't feel motivate if the lecturers are just read the slides". (Focus Group 2)*

*"mem1; I can read it on my own, why you are reading it back to me. you know, it is fine if they read a little a bit and then they explain like you know, I do not want to say the name." (Focus Group 2)*

*"Certain subject. when the lecturer come to class and then cheat-chat. and they are not really going to the content of the lecturer slide." (Focus Group 1)*

*"mem3: and then they ask you about where you come from."*

*"mem1: if that for the first class, okay lah. but like few classes, also"*

*"mem3: can so here, can saw there."*

*"Me: you almost got nothing from them?"*

*"mem3: not almost, but literally got nothing." (Focus Group 1)*

*"If I am do not understand what I am being taught i do not want to study it, just give up." (Focus Group 2)*

Another issue students note is the relevance of what they learn to their careers. Some students mention that, in many cases, they do not understand the point of what they learn; in other words, lecturers do not answer the question: of why we are learning this and that.

*"They do not emphasis on the importance of why how you are supposed to go through this course." (Student 1)*

*"It is like, this is happed because of this, but people did not agree so they use another theory. so why do we need to learn about that. you understand what I mean" (focus group 2)*

So basically, lecturers need to develop the way they deliver their materials. One of the students suggests providing more examples that students could understand more. Another thing lecturers can do is relate what they teach with student life and career. Like the lecturers who taught Student 4. What these lecturers did was connect the things that they taught with students' future careers. So, he keeps identifying the things they need to focus on because they will most likely be used in the future. And the other things that they do not need to give much attention to.

*"A is because lecture B she gives more example or more description about to what she delivers compared to lectures A she only read the slide. She just read, just briefly description, no example, we cannot relate. So, because of that we cannot understand lah what lecture B." (Student 2)*

*"He takes one topic, he related with his experience, and he related with the other topic. it is kind like two chapter, not like really two topics, two subjects. I mean coincidently he teach both subject, he relates both. The subject kind of blends in. so that is kind like help understand that is: oh, this is what this is for, so this is one, so this formula used in the industry more often that this so this is that. So, you do not really need to focus. I am to distinguish like: this is an important, this is the one that I need to focus. I understand it better." (Student 4)*

Another issue related to lecturers' attitudes, whether by humiliating them, behaving arrogantly, or being very strict and rigid. Or forcing them to do things that they do not like. All of which might affect their motivation.



*"And the other things are humiliating student. being a lecturer to lead people, right? why do you makes student feel so small when they do not know something, I do not understand that." (Focus Group 2)*

*"It is like we were like" excuse me, Dr, I am sorry" They will be like," Why are you so stupid!", they would not say that. but indirectly, and you end up feeling so down for asking a question that you were curious about. And that makes, like, not want to ask anymore after that. So, the question you have tends to not ask, so you do not fully understand what you are learning." (Focus Group 2)*

*"They have the superiority complex. I do not understand why, it is like, I am better than you, I am older than you. So, I can tell you anything" (focus group 2)*

*"Because they are so tied, they are so formal, so on, like they are giving too much pressure in term of giving assignment to strict on giving assignment. You have to answer this, like the exactly what I want." (Student 9)*

Instead, lecturers need to be more considerate of their students. They need to be more sincere in their job and teaching by being innovative in how they teach. As well as being respectful to students by treating everyone equally. Since students might have to like the instructors first to like the subject they teach. One of the lecturers has mainly focused on her role to provide emotional support for the students as part of her duty, especially for the new batch.

*"I really have really have respect to the lectures that. kind treat you equally, like they do not put you down. I really want to learn" (focus group 2)*

*"I would teach from my heart and soul. I do not want to half as, the things half as. Because they do not deserve that they deserve more from me. So, I am going to make sure that I am pass it down properly, assignment do it different than essay, come on! you know as them to think about something innovative," (Focus Group 2)*

*"I think that is I want to develop, the skill that I want to develop. So, that, if I am going to the industry I will make the student, first, I need them to like me first. Not the subject, I want to teach, first, I want to like me first, then I will make them to like the subject that I lam about to teach." (Student 9)*

*"That is my strength that support and giving them awareness, giving them, because I give them support first, emotional support then they can hear without any judgment." (Lecturer 2)*

*"I am thinking of love, care and positive relationship is a very meaningful for those students who are facing the new environment" (Lecturer 2)*

Another lecturer believes that she needs to develop her IT skill to present her course in a way that attracts students' attention since she notes that the current generation may find it hard to focus. Moreover, they are not adapted to the printed materials.

*"So, in the process to acquire you need to make a variety of method in order to have that result. So, for me, the process is important, is not based on my process, which mean It each, I teach, I teach, and then you need to absorbed all the information and I teach based on my*

*ways, we need adopt and adapt the situation, so, I need to teach based on what they want, okay, so the method, the process of deliver the information, I need to acquire the knowledge of it. And most of the time, they want something that is attractive, how you deliver information. For example, I give a book with wording from up top to bottom, or I use infographic, which one do you think the student like to read?" (Lecturer 4)*

*"They are based on the gadget information, that is why that coming from me, I do not know other lecture, is upgrading the way I want to deliver the information. In a way I want to upgrade information, I need to upgrade my skills, right? to accommodate or to capture the need of my student" (Lecturer 4)*

*"So, not all lecturers are to change that process, because we are living in a non-IT technology where we are based on the printer version. but youngsters nowadays are not based on the printed version." (Lecturer 4)*

*"We are dealing with a generation that, sorry to say, but hard to give 100% percent focus, okay, so in order for them to give their focus, full focus to us." (Lecturer 4)*

However, other students believe that being strict might be essential for the students to do their work. One of the students believes that students tend to be lazy and less serious with their studies when their lecturers are very nice and kind and do not pressure them much. Moreover, they believe it is important to be stressed out to work hard.

*"Really, if that lecturer, chill, now put very a lot of stress on the assignment. and thinking like," I still can chill, play games, or still okay," But the lecturers might be very strict," Next week, you guys have got a presentation." for me I will be like, oh shit, I need to prepare, I need to do that already, I need to do that thing." (Focus Group 1)*

*"I think stress, and anxiety help motivate. But is not good. but it helps. When you think about the due date, that is very close. Or like exam, or when you think this very hard" (Focus Group 1)*

*"If the lecturers are very strict. Then I will more focus on that course" (Focus Group 1)*

Both students and lecturers believe universities should include more practical elements as part of their programs instead of overemphasizing the theoretical part. For example, lecturer 1 believes teaching should not be limited to the classroom. Students should be given a chance to go outside and explore the world. And she suggests this could be possible if the university develops a good relationship with outside agencies like NGOs. This institution can facilitate such activities.

*"We can have hybrid learning so is not that face to face. Hybrid learning saying that like this, give some flexy hour. So does not 100% class, do not need to be 100% attendance. And allow few students especially when they are producing some, doing their assignment to go out. To be able to connect to people. I think that, yeah." (Lecturer 1)*

*"Student should also be able to go out and to learn from people outside and I think there should be good relationships should be established with the social agencies. And they always be with us I mean the hospital, the schools and NGOs and should pave some things that student can relate to the organization. Because we are psychology, right?" (Lecturer 1)*

*"mem2: It is not just your soft skill, it is also, your practical skill, application skill you know, you cannot do that. You cannot just rely on your internship. Internship it does not do shit. Internship is always you just setting around [ not do anything]" (Focus Group 2)*

*"mem3: When you are working, you are not going to write an essay. You know." (Focus Group 2)*

*"If I am a lecturer I will do like most practical like that thing. You know is not only about theory. Like if you just learn theory but you did not actually do it. Like you want actually really understand about it." (Focus Group 2)*

Students also believe that classes should be shorter. For example, one of them suggests that two hours is too much. Instead, the class should be only 45 minutes or one hour. Another issue is the time of the classes. Some faculties, like social science, usually conduct afternoon classes. And sometimes it can be after 6 or 7 nights. And some students find that counter-productive because, currently, they have already become exhausted. So, it might be more efficient if they set limits to class time. For example, classes do not go beyond 4 PM. Besides that, they feel they have been overloaded with their credit hours and assignments. Especially the extra-curricular one, which one of them believes must be optional instead of being mandated for all students.

*"Students do not really study. like, do not study some, some might be they just do not want to study, some do not really because of the amount of assignment we have" (Focus group 2)*

*"For me we do not actually have time to study, because we are for me and mem2 got 8 class and seven tutorials. So, you do not have time to study when you come home you already exhausted you know." (Focus group 2)*

*"I hate the fact that they have class from 2 to 4 and from 4 to 6. Like that is so shitty, you know, I know this one fact, it is a real fact, I do not know which from theories, guys, I forget. Human rights, they cannot focus for more than one hour. You know that.*

*mem2: "And imagine from 2 to 4 you have one class and 4 to 6 you have another class.*

*mem1: "And they must rush to another class; some did not have their lunch; why can you have at least one hour break. So that's another reason why it demotivates students to actually concentrate." (Focus Group 2)*

*"What you have to always have been time. So, I think the credit hour is killing me. And just like ours is killing. I think maybe you could shorten the period of the lecturer." (Student 3)*

*"So, I were a lecturer, I only teach my student 45 minutes, other than that, I will try to do some activities like brain storming. And try to make it fun" (Focus Group 2)*

*"They are like burdening us with unnecessarily things for me. In my opinion such as co-curriculum I think that is a very waste of time. I think that some people like that co-curriculum so you could go. Maybe you do not have to like to cut it off. Wholly and totally" (Student 3)*

Another issue is related to the assessment that is given to the students. Some students complain about the absence of freedom to explore and do their assignments in the way that they like.

*"What I notice, they really put a lot of weight on your assignment. And you know, what, preparing fix scheme of how to do the assignment. So, you do not have, you are not really having a chance to find your own way. So, you cannot, if your self-study, maybe us, we study about theories kind We can study about any kind of theory, but they are like. [ you must study]*

*this theory and this theory, you must go according to this. So, you cannot go and fine your own. You cannot be independent in that way. So, once you spoon-fed you are going must depends on them also" (Focus Group 2)*

However, one of the lecturers noted that students prefer a more fixed and objective type of assignment. He believes they need their reading and assessment to be objective to get a good mark. And that is like what other students noted regarding student attitude toward their assignments. They tend to follow the exact rubric without going beyond that.

*"They need a tailor-made reading, they are looking for exact objective answer and they approach their study very target marks base, I would not even say exam, base, it is marks base."*

*"The inability to reflect on reading, I can give someone a piece that is high critical of Malaysian politics but if the person does not reflect and comes a way without being disturbed by the reading then their no process of internalization."*

*"They can't really search things like real issue like right now. (She searches for the proper word). Like when they do the research, they always stick to the basic issue such as drug addiction, smoking issue, they do not, really explore the other issues such as" (Student 5)*

*"What I see lah kan. The students are more to. They like to follow the guideline. And they stick to the structure of the subject. Like they stick to the rubric" (Student 5)*

One way to deal with that is by giving students the freedom to choose the topic they like instead of being assigned by the lecturer. Another type of assignment is self-autobiography or asking the students to reflect on the theory they have studied with their experience. Another thing the lecturer can do is consider the students' effort in doing their assignment instead of being very strict regarding the rubric.

*"You (I think) that is a part of directed learning. I do not have to tell you what you want to do, I do not have to assign you which topic you should do. You, Yourself, find yourself. it must come from you" (Lecturer 1)*

*"I think, I ask them to write about self-autobiography essay actually, I love doing that. Because they are not restricting to any theory. But you after that, after learning what you go through because I need to test whether people understand the link to the theory so then after that I ask them: can you link up any books do they have the same problem as you, so what are the smallest similarity, what is the nearest people get during adapting to new culture" (Lecturer 1)*

*"I mention to you but I will look to the effort also, maybe the effort will not describe in the rubric. But the effort is much better to be acknowledge by the lecturers" (Lecturer 2)*

So far, we see the issues from the student lens. However, it is important also to note what lecturers are struggling with and what can be done. Lecturer 4 notes that the university requires them to do too many other things besides their main job as an instructor. One lecturer points out that she must consider publications and, attending conferences, doing community and administrative work. All that besides preparing and teaching in the class. Lecturer 4 also noted that such administrative work is very tiring, and it also would come and disturb her schedule.

*"I think I will try to give you the picture of cycle of lecturer job, apart from teaching and learning. We need to, research, you like to do research, and then apart from researching, you need to make sure, you need to publish, publication and also you need to go for presentation*

*to the conference and also you need to do community service that is the case of lecturers and also not to forget the administrative work, so the administrative work" (Lecturer 4)*

*"Because it is really tiring, it is really tiring actually, to do the administrative, because my setting, mindset is I am lecturer, and my core job is to teach so when administrative coming in and disturbing the scheduling" (Lecturer 4)*

Another lecturer notes the dichotomy of whether you sacrifice your life and work non-stop 24/7 to get promoted. Or to get your life and forget being promoted even if you are a good scholar.

*"If you are not involving people will look at you that you are not committed but you actually have family. But, you have family, and you have other things to do in life. So, it is like non-stop work! you are not happy," (Lecturer 1)*

*"Sometimes when I feel that this is too much I would rather getting promoted because I need my life. So is just like, if you want to enjoy or you got promoted (you choose one). If you got promoted, you will not enjoy your life; you would be working like 24/7." (Lecturer 1)*

*"So, probably would not agree on this, so probably for these people who do not agree on this. They do not see that as important. they would not get promoted for the rest of them. Those is a good scholar; they might be a good teacher probably but because of that they would not get promote. Because they are not supporting the activity." (Lecturer 1)*

She also noted the difficulties of making changes in the materials she is assigned to teach. If the university gives them some instruction and they have a better idea to execute the task (like changing the course outcome). They still must go through a long process of meetings and proposals. So, they end up just sticking with the old syllabus. Ultimately, they do not feel happy with what they are doing.

*"I think we are tied down with the instruction that we receive from the university. We have better idea but that must go through certain process, go through certain authority. For example: I feel like last time. I wanted to change my course. but I must follow what have been written, do not change the course outcome, this is not right, and if I want to change it you would have to go through certain senate meeting, ding-dong here ding-dong there, and you need to rationalize everything there. And that is okay, but going through that process, red-tape a lot of red-tape, to make it better. And because of that we continue to teach using the old syllabus, because is not that helpful enough of getting your ideas heart and implemented later, executed, executed yeah! But then you are being not happy with what you are doing" (Lecturer 1)*

So, lecturers want more time for themselves to learn and develop their teaching. Understandably, university rankings are highly reliant on publications. But at the same time, they should focus on the quality of their teaching and the people who will lead the future. Lastly, one lecturer hopes the procedure will be less stringent and more flexible. They can have more freedom to apply their ideas instead of feeling hopeless and unmotivated after they realize all the rules and regulations that forbid them from doing what they want.

*"I hope for the university is to understand the workload of the lecturers, we have many things that we need to fulfill in order to fulfill the expectation of higher management apart from teaching, so we hope that, please management just give us time, give us back our time for us to focus on teaching, upgrading our skills in teaching and learning. I know publication is*

*important for the UMS ranking, so the ranking, you know that the ranking of university is based on publication. "(Lecturer 4)*

*"Because of that the diversion we need to divert from learning and teaching to that publication because we want to increase that ranking, okay, how about the student, how about the welfare of student, how about the quality to be the future man force, manpower in the industries" (Lecturer 4)*

*"Okay, one of the processes that is very important, and we need to get, and also the environment. And do not be too stringent in the procedure like we have this Malaysian MQA (accreditation program), so you got to follow all this. Sometimes it is ridiculous certain things. So, if you have a great idea, you cannot just bang on that. People would ask you: have you check? have you check these rules and regulations this and that. Sometimes you lift without, sometime you end up becoming demotivated" (Lecturer 1)*

### **Discussion**

This study covers the main approaches to promoting self-directed learning from a Malaysian perspective. These approaches have two main categories, which are the ones that are related to students. And ones that are related to the higher-education institution itself.

As human beings, we are naturally prone to be in a sedentary state. That is why Promoting self-directed learning requires helping students to identify their life purpose. Many students come to the university without a clear vision of the meaning of their life. And subsequently, they may not work hard since their nothing to work hard for. Educators need to encourage students to reflect more on their life, and studies show a connection between self-reflection and academic achievement (Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Moreover, having meaning in life seems to be associated with academic success as well as well-being (Debats et al., 1995; García-Alandete, 2015; Kiang & Witkow, 2015)

Another aspect of improving students' life is related to changing their minds. Our findings show that students are afraid of expressing their opinions and individuality. This might affect their motivation toward their study since they feel forced to comply. This fear also undermines their critical thinking. Thus, educators need to consider relieving students from this fear and providing them more freedom to express themselves.

However, even if lecturers give them freedom. Students may not simply use it. Considering that they have been internalizing this fear since they were children. So, reprogramming their mind to delete their fear may take time and effort. It is essential to help students to develop their individuality and autonomy, which may eventually be reflected in their life and academic satisfaction.

On the other hand, lecturers need to develop their teaching methods. And try to be less reliant on their slides. Many students note that they are disturbed by that. When they see lecturers, they do not put effort into their teaching. Students themselves become less motivated to study. Since lecturer's act as a role model for students.

However, as our findings suggest, it does not mean that lecturers must be entertaining. In fact, we do believe that learning should not be an entertaining process. And students should not expect that they will be entertained while they are learning. And it is understandable why

many students expect that. Considering being grown-up surrounded by all sorts of entertainment, whether on your phone or your laptop.

Moreover, lecturers should make their teaching and course materials more relevant to student's lives and careers. Many students struggle to connect and relate to what they are learning. And this is affecting their motivation. And many students believe they need more practical chances than just learning theory the whole time.

Besides that, both assessments must be more flexible, mind-triggering, and reflective. Lecturers should design assignments without the minimum restriction. So, students can show themselves. However, the same problem that exists with self-reflection also exists here. Students may not be yet adopted to have this flexibility. And even if it has been offered to them, many students may not use it. Lecturers need to be patient regarding adopting students with such type of assignment.

Instead, students need to adapt to the learning process's boredom. And it is not expected to be an easy transition. But it is a critical one. For example, universities should initiate more campaign-related that educate students regarding the impact of being driven by hedonistic desires.

Other issues related to giving lecturers more time and flexibility to improve their teaching and syllabus. Lecturers note that they are being overly pushed by university administration to involve in many things unrelated to their main job as an educator, especially publication. That is why most academics are mainly concerned with their publication as a means of promotion since it is the most weighted element for university ranking (Remler & Pema, 2009).

Theoretically, ranking is also affected by the quality of teaching. But most universities rely on some sort of course evaluation. Which might be an irrelevance to the quality of teaching. One reason is that students may not be trained to appreciate the good teaching. So, they may appreciate the funny and less qualified lecturers more than the strict but highly qualified instructors.

Another reason based on our findings related to student fear. Students may give a good evaluation not because the lecturers deserve it but because they fear their marks will be jeopardized if they criticize them. The main point here is that universities need to rethink their priorities and main purposes again. Considering also that university ranking was found to be negatively associated with learning satisfaction among students (Huang et al., 2015).

In the end, universities need to rethink again regarding what are their main priorities. And instead of putting too much credit on publication and administrative work. They should be more concerned with their teaching quality by providing lecturers more time and flexibility.

### **Conclusion**

We argue That transforming teacher-directed learning into student-centred learning includes personal and institutional transformation. Therefore, it requires collaboration between lecturers, students, and policymakers. Lecturers must do more research and study related to

the main challenges related to student learning, like the cultural and psychological barriers and then identify the most appropriate approaches to tackle these issues. On the other hand, students need to collaborate with their lecturers, whether by joining their research as participants. Further, by giving them honest and educated feedback regarding their lecturers' behaviour. And here comes the role of policymakers to provide more protection for the students to express their opinion without being afraid of backlash. As well as providing lecturers with more flexibility to reshape their course syllabus and more time to develop their teaching.

### **Theoretical and Contextual Contributions**

This research makes significant strides in theoretical and contextual domains of educational psychology. Theoretically, it broadens the scope of self-determination theory within the milieu of Malaysian higher education, dissecting the intricate motivations of university students. By examining how autonomy, competence, and relatedness dynamically influence students' academic motivations in a unique cultural setting, this study challenges and refines the traditional paradigm of intrinsic motivation. It posits that motivation in educational pursuits is significantly shaped by cultural norms and societal expectations, thus adding a critical cross-cultural perspective to the self-determination framework. Additionally, this work argues that fostering elements of self-determination theory, such as autonomy support and competence facilitation, is integral to promoting self-directed learning, thereby contributing to the learner's intrinsic motivation and personal growth.

Contextually, the findings shed light on the pedagogical approaches of Malaysian higher education institutions, suggesting a pressing need for reform. The study champions pedagogical innovation that prioritizes critical thinking, reflective practices, and the application of knowledge, thus enriching the global dialogue on enhancing educational quality. It argues for transforming learning environments into arenas that facilitate not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of students' personal and career-related goals. In doing so, this research stands at the forefront of advocating for educational policies that embrace cultural nuances and address the contextual realities of students, thereby sculpting a more bespoke and effective approach to learning. This study underscores the importance of practical applications in the curriculum, which can bridge the gap between theory and real-world experience, enhancing both student engagement and motivation.

In essence, this research calls for a reevaluation of educational priorities, advocating for a balance between research output and teaching excellence. It highlights the necessity for educators to be granted the time and autonomy to refine their teaching methodologies, aligning them with the evolving needs of their students. By drawing attention to the misalignment between university rankings and student satisfaction, the research also suggests re-prioritizing institutional goals to better support the intellectual and personal development of the student body.

### **References**

- Abdi Zarrin, S., Gracia, E., & Paixão, M. P. (2020). Prediction of academic procrastination by fear of failure and self-regulation. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 20(3), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.12738/jestp.2020.3.003>
- Boyer, S. L., Edmondson, D. R., Artis, A. B., & Fleming, D. (2013). Self-Directed Learning. *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/0273475313494010*, 36(1), 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475313494010>



- Brockett, R. G., & Hiemstra, R. (2012). Reframing the Meaning of Self-Directed Learning: An Updated Model. *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*, 155–161. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2012/papers/22>
- Cazan, A.-M., & Schiopca, B.-A. (2014). Self-directed Learning, Personality Traits and Academic Achievement. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 127, 640–644. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SBSPRO.2014.03.327>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). Basics of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. In *4th ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA*. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/basics-of-qualitative-research/book235578>
- Coşkun, K. (2020). A New Explanation for the Conflict Between Constructivist and Objectivist Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920938280>
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. *Sage Publications, Inc.*, 4(1), 1–646.
- Debats, D. L., Drost, J., & Hansen, P. (1995). Experiences of meaning in life: A combined qualitative and quantitative approach. *British Journal of Psychology*, 86(3), 359–375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1995.tb02758.x>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. In *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology: Volume 1* (pp. 416–437). SAGE Publications Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249215.n21>
- Doody, O., & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. - The University of Sheffield (Alma). *The University of Sheffield, 2013*, 15–20. [https://ulir.ul.ie/handle/10344/5588%0Ahttp://find.shef.ac.uk/primo\\_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=RS\\_613515578282013nginterviewstocollectdata&indx=1&reclds=RS\\_613515578282013nginterviewstocollectdata&recldxs=0&](https://ulir.ul.ie/handle/10344/5588%0Ahttp://find.shef.ac.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=RS_613515578282013nginterviewstocollectdata&indx=1&reclds=RS_613515578282013nginterviewstocollectdata&recldxs=0&)
- García-Alandete, J. (2015). Does Meaning in Life Predict Psychological Well-Being?: An Analysis Using the Spanish Versions of the Purpose-In-Life Test and the Ryff's Scales. *The European Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 3(2), 89–98. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejcop.v3i2.27>
- Hsu, Y.-C., & Shiue, Y.-M. (2005). The Effect of Self-Directed Learning Readiness on Achievement Comparing Face-to-Face and Two-Way Distance Learning Instruction. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 32(2), 143.
- Huang, L.-L., Chen, S.-W., & Chien, C.-L. (2015). The effect of university ranking on learning satisfaction: Social identities and self-identity as the suppressor and mediators. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 18(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12064>
- Kek, M., & Huijser, H. (2011). Exploring the combined relationships of student and teacher factors on learning approaches and self-directed learning readiness at a Malaysian university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(2), 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903519210>
- Khalid, M., Bashir, S., & Amin, H. (2020). Relationship between Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Academic Achievement of University Students: A Case of Online Distance Learning and Traditional Universities. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 42(2), 131–148.
- Kiang, L., & Witkow, M. R. (2015). Normative changes in meaning in life and links to adjustment in adolescents from Asian American backgrounds. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 6(2), 164–173. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aap0000018>

- Knowles. (1977). SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: A GUIDE FOR LEARNERS AND TEACHERS Malcolm Knowles New York: Association Press, 1975. 135 pp., paperbound. *Group & Organization Studies*, 2(2), 256–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105960117700200220>
- Kok, J. K., Tunku, U., & Rahman, A. (2016). THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROCRASTINATION AND MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS OF SELF-REGULATION. In *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia* (Vol. 30, Issue 1). <https://spaj.ukm.my/ppppm/jpm/article/view/204>
- Lew, M. D. N., & Schmidt, H. G. (2011). Self-reflection and academic performance: is there a relationship? *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 16(4), 529–545. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-011-9298-z>
- Loyens, S. M. M., Magda, J., & Rikers, R. M. J. P. (2008). Self-directed learning in problem-based learning and its relationships with self-regulated learning. In *Educational Psychology Review* (Vol. 20, Issue 4, pp. 411–427). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-008-9082-7>
- Morris, T. H. (2019). Adaptivity Through Self-Directed Learning to Meet the Challenges of Our Ever-Changing World. *Adult Learning*, 30(2), 56–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159518814486>
- Ramamurthy, S., Er, H. M., Devi Nadarajah, V., & Radhakrishnan, A. K. (2019). Medical students' orientation toward lifelong learning in an outcome-based curriculum and the lessons learnt. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2019.1646894>, 43(S1), S6–S11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2019.1646894>
- Ramli, N., Muljono, P., & Afendi, F. M. (2018). External Factors, Internal Factors and Self-Directed Learning Readiness. *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research*, 5(1), 37–42. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2018.51.37.42>
- Remler, D., & Pema, E. (2009). *Why do Institutions of Higher Education Reward Research While Selling Education?* <https://doi.org/10.3386/w14974>
- Saeid, N., & Eslaminejad, T. (2017). Relationship between Student's Self-Directed-Learning Readiness and Academic Self-Efficacy and Achievement Motivation in Students. *International Education Studies*, 10(1), 225–232. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v10n1p225>
- San, Y. L., Roslan, S. B., & Sabouripour, F. (2016). Relationship between self-regulated learning and academic procrastination. *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, 13(4), 459–466. <https://doi.org/10.3844/ajassp.2016.459.466>
- Siddiqui, F., Nerali, J., & Telang, L. (2021). Relationship between the sense of coherence, self-directed learning readiness, and academic performance in Malaysian undergraduate dental students. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 10(1). [https://doi.org/10.4103/JEHP.JEHP\\_758\\_20](https://doi.org/10.4103/JEHP.JEHP_758_20)
- Tekkol, I. A., & Demirel, M. (2018). An investigation of self-directed learning skills of undergraduate students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(NOV), 2324. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2018.02324/BIBTEX>
- Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. (1991). Improving the quality of student learning: the influence of learning context and student approaches to learning on learning outcomes. *Higher Education* 1991 22:3, 22(3), 251–266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00132290>
- Turan, M. B., & Koç, K. (2018). The impact of self-directed learning readiness on critical thinking and self-efficacy among the students of the school of physical education and sports. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 7(6), 98–105. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v7n6p98>

- Wong, F. M. F., Tang, A. C. Y., & Cheng, W. L. S. (2021). Factors associated with self-directed learning among undergraduate nursing students: A systematic review. *Nurse Education Today*, *104*, 104998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.NEDT.2021.104998>
- Zhoc, K. C. H., Chung, T. S. H., & King, R. B. (2018). Emotional intelligence (EI) and self-directed learning: Examining their relation and contribution to better student learning outcomes in higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(6), 982–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1002/BERJ.3472>