Informal Online Self Directed Learning Using Current Technology to the Advantage of Adult Learners

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Abstract-The current paper discusses informal lifelong online learning. Self-directed learning emphasizes the choices in one's learning path; in effect, intrinsic motivation as critical to self-directed learning. Self-directed learning can be defined as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help from others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating outcomes", Knowles, 1975, in self-directed learning, the learners need to be empowered to make their own learning decisions, Downes, 2010. Informal learning provides a lot more choices for learning. People might feel demotivated to learn in school because there are restrictions that might interfere with their motivation, such as demands for completing tasks without the available resources in the classroom. Wolters,2011, Cox,2013, thought through his review of the technological and educational research changes over the last 40 years, students use technology outside school even more than in school, which makes informal learning equally important as formal learning in human learning and development. This is one reason why the research on motivation of self-directed informal learners is needed (song, Bonk, 2016).

Keywords- *Online Learning, Self-Directed Learning, Informal Learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

Brookfield said that Self-directed learning focuses on the process by which adults take control of their own learning, in particular how they set their own learning goals, locate appropriate resources, decide on which learning methods to use and evaluate their progress. Work on self-direction is now so widespread that it justifies an annual international symposium devoted solely to research and theory in the area (alsaadat, 2017).

Today, life-long learning is crucial for gaining new knowledge and skills in an ever-changing society and it doesn't necessarily happen in formal education environments. The majority of adult learning occurs informally and technology is key in attaining these experiences. Although informal learning is not a new concept, social technologies enabled new opportunities that were not possible in the past and even blurred the distinction between formal and informal learning. Many scholars (Czerkawski & Hernandez, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Kassens-Noor, 2012; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012) also emphasize the social nature of informal learning in the digital age, as student experiences are widely influenced by social technologies. For instance, today's students use instant messaging, visit websites, listen to music, play games, and download materials as a means of informal learning (Lai, Khaddage, & Knezek, 2013), and all these methods are key for social interaction(Czerkawski, 2016).

Munoz, et al, 2014 reported that adult learning is understood to cover all formal, non-formal and informal learning undertaken by adults after they have left their initial education and training, whether for professional reasons (such as re-skilling and up-skilling) or for private purposes (e.g. social, cultural, artistic and societal learning) The above-mentioned agenda focuses especially on disadvantaged groups (low-skilled individuals or early school leavers) and calls for a holistic approach to adult learning: improving access for all individuals, investing in guidance and validation systems, sharing responsibilities while maintaining public commitment, investing in learning at work and investing in and understanding the benefits of learning at older ages and intergenerational learning (Munoz, et al, 2014). Munoz, et al, 2014 continued that expanding learning opportunities through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has been highlighted as an opportunity to innovate and increase the quality of the educational systems. Taking as a starting point the definition of open learning that gives to the learner a degree of flexibility in the choice of topics, place, pace and or method, they defined open education as the learning experience that gives the learner a degree of flexibility in the choice of what (topics), where (place), when (pace) and how (method) to learn/study. The use of ICT to foster this kind of learning has proved useful in many ways: removing the entry barriers to education; allowing access to knowledge anytime and anywhere; increasing the possibility of collaboration with others; enhancing the opportunities for personalization, including different paces and pathways for learning, and facilitating the possibility of self-directed learning through access to open educational resources and Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs, to mention but a few (Munoz, et al, 2014).

II. PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Kuboni, 2013, based her study around four principles of learning they are:

instrumental learning: kuboni reviewed different point of view on instrumental learning she stated that Many analysts in the field of adult education hold the view that instrumental learning can undermine efforts to facilitate meaningful learning. Hyland and Merrill (2003), for example, are concerned that "imagination and creativity are often stifled in the pursuit of behaviourist learning outcomes or instrumental employability" (p.169). Devos (2002), looking specifically at learning in the workplace, highlights the work of Marsick and Watkins (1990) who, she claims, have contributed to moving the discussion away from "a narrow instrumentalist approach", which she sees as reflecting the limits of behaviourism. Rust (2009) takes a more micro perspective. In outlining the tenets that, in his view, should inform assessment practices in the adult education sector, he cautions against instrumentalist approaches and calls for a greater emphasis on "assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning (Kuboni, 2013).

III. INDEPENDENT LEARNING

As stated earlier, independent learning does not occupy a prominent position in the literature on online learning given the capability of the web-based environment to support social interaction. Some would argue though that one's ability to engage in shared learning with others depends not only on facilitating environmental factors, but more importantly on one's ability to take responsibility for and manage one's own learning. It is in that context that it was considered appropriate to investigate the extent to which this approach to learning was a feature of the learning mode of the participants of this study (Kuboni, 2013).

IV. INTERACTIVE LEARNING

Kuboni, 2013 integrated various philosophies on inter acting learning she wrote the role of interaction in learning at a distance was an area of focus for theorists and practitioners even during the industrialization era (Daniel & Marquis, 1989; Moore, 1989). However, the introduction of the interactive ICTs has allowed for a greater focus on interpersonal communication (Cookson & Chang, 1995; Wagner, 1994; Shackleford & Maxwell, 2012), and more specifically on the role of social interaction in the act of learning (Kaye, 1992; Rovai, 2002). Nichani (2000), in making his case for an online learning community, supports the view advanced by Brown and Duguid (2000) who assert as follows:

Despite the tendency to shut ourselves away and sit in Rodinesque isolation when we have to learn, learning is a remarkably social process. Social groups provide the resources for their members to learn.

Hendricks (2012) provides various interpretations to explain the nature of learning that takes place in a social context. Taking as his starting point, the constructivist view, which holds that knowledge is built socially through inquiry and reflection, he describes collaborative learning as follows; It allows for student interaction with more capable peers and less capable peers in order to master critical concepts or skills using language as a necessary tool to negotiate and renegotiate meaning/knowledge. (Kuboni, 2013)

V. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative learning can be regarded as extending along a continuum from learning in a social context to engagement in some collaborative activity intended to yield a defined outcome (Kuboni, 2013). Kuboni provided definition of collaborative learning as follows; Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, and Turoff (1995) state, Collaborative learning refers to any activity in which two or more people work together to create meaning, explore a topic or improve skills.

For Haythornthwaite (2006), it is working towards a common goal. She elaborates as follows:

Collaboration models the way work unfolds outside classrooms. It can emulate and train for future workplace practices, including learning how to share ideas, voice opinions, work on a team, and manage projects. It gives individuals experience in project and group management. Moreover, during their collaboration, students are also doing the important work of learning how to do all this online and gaining skills in online communication and group management (Kuboni, 2013).

VI. WHY INFORMAL ONLINE LEARNING

McLoughlin & Lee, 2010, Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2011, Greenhow et al, 2009, McLoughlin & Lee, 2010 discussed online resources for self-directed learners. The idea was that for creating their own knowledge, self-directed learners explore learning materials, monitor their learning, reflect on it, and self-evaluate it. The availability of online learning resources gained momentum for self-directed online learners to support their knowledge building process during the last decade. People can learn through virtual school/university/online classes, and free/open educational resources. Learners can build their knowledge by participating in virtual worlds, online communities, and social media. Learning a language is possible through the Internet individually or with others around the world. In addition, online learning resources with participatory technologies have immense potential to support self-directed learning. By focusing on the characteristics of Web 2.0, the learners' participatory aspects was emphasized and creative practices of online resources that educators should consider, for example, as participating in knowledge building through collaborative wiki activities, creating and sharing learning materials, such as podcasts, video casts, and, micro, blogs. The active, process-based, participatory, and social aspects of online learning resources could support people to be independent, self-directed learners (song, Bonk, 2016).

VII. RELATED WORKS

Richards and Tangney, 2008 concluded in their study that as a potential solution to increasing demands on mental health services at universities, this project seeks to develop an informal online learning community for mental health support and education. Students' use of the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially to access health information, provides a supporting rationale for this project. The design for this study is grounded in the pedagogical principles of informal learning and the practices for building successful online communities. The student online mental health community has been implemented at the authors' university (University of Dublin, Trinity College) for one academic term and the initial analysis of its usage is positive. Features that are being positively evaluated are the role of the reader participant, disinhibition that arises from anonymity, online provision acting as a gateway to further support, and online provision reaching an audience who ordinarily do not use face-to-face services. At the same time, difficulties specific to this type of community have surfaced, including technical issues, implications of anonymity and user safety (Richards and Tangney, 2008).

The focus of Tan's, 2013, paper is a project conducted in 2011, exploring the use of YouTube in the classroom. The project conducted a number of focus groups for which highlighted a number of issues surrounding independent informal learning environments. The questions posed by this research are concerned with what constitutes learning in these spaces; how valid this is perceived to be by the students and how they engage with materials in this space. A question also posed was how cognisant the students are of their learning in these spaces and how they perceive the efficacy of the materials to support and enhance their learning. The research uncovered how the students interacted with each other in these informal spaces and the role that YouTube video content plays in community formation and supporting informal peer learning. The nature of informal learning spaces being that their focus being not solely of education, but also of entertainment leads to a variation in quality, reliability and suitability of content. The research also explored the students' digital literacy, uncovering the strategies used to first navigate in these spaces and then critically engage, analyse and assess materials that they may find (Tan, 2013).

Lammers, 2013 wrote an article on digital media. He said videogames, such as The Sims, are a digital media passion drawing adolescents to online spaces where they create and share content. This article explores how discourses and expectations are taught in one online, videogame-related fan site of adolescents who read and write Sims fan fiction. Using Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory, data from a 2-year virtual ethnography are analyzed to study pedagogic interactions between moderators and members within The Sims Writers' Hangout, an online discussion forum. Findings point to the dominance of regulative discourse and how discourses relocated from other media sites serve as pedagogic discourse in this informal digital literacy learning space. This article contributes to our understanding of digital literacy and learning in online environments by focusing on the pedagogy used to teach expectations. The analysis also points to the utility of Bernstein's theory for studying informal online learning (Lammers, 2013).

Campana, 2014, in his study argued that Informal learning networks play a key role in the skill and professional development of professionals, working in micro-businesses within Australia's digital media industry, as they do not have access to learning and development or human resources sections that can assist in mapping their learning pathway. Professionals working in this environment would need to adopt an informal learning approach to their skill and professional development by utilising their social and business networks. The paper describes the theme of this research and how it aligns with previous research and other relevant studies. It presents relevant theories and perspectives of informal learning and the role of social learning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with digital media professionals to understand how they manage their ongoing skill and professional development, and to explore what role informal learning networks play in their development. Through the interviews the study found these professionals utilised a mixture of online technologies and face-to-face engage (campana, 2014).

In their study Song&Bonk, 2016, suggested that Learning is becoming more self-directed and informal with the support of emerging technologies. A variety of online resources have promoted informal learning by allowing people to learn on demand and just when needed. It is significant to understand self-directed informal learners' motivational aspects, their learning goals, obstacles, and successes when using online resources. However, scant knowledge exists about self-directed learning factors, such as informal learners' behaviors and motivations, which would suggest guidelines for improving their learning performance. The goal of this study was to contribute to the understanding of learners' motivational factors and self-directed learning aspects of informal learning when using online learning resources. In this study, a survey of learners from various informal learning websites was conducted. Quantitative analysis including descriptive and frequency analysis regarding informal learning experiences was conducted. The results show that the main flow of self-directed informal learning through online resources: freedom and choice; control; and interest and engagement (song, Bonk, 2016).

Gomez, et al, 2019, discussed informal learning strategies they thought that the professional development of principals is a key element in improving the quality of educational systems. Although it is common for the training of educational leaders to be associated to formal pre and in service principal development programmes, informal learning opportunities are increasingly common. However, research analysing informal learning processes among this professional group is scarce. The purpose of this paper is to identify the factors promoting informal learning strategies, online and face-to-face, used by principals as part of their professional development. The methodology involved implementing an online self-administered questionnaire to a sample of 715 school leaders. The study begins with a univariate and bivariate descriptive analysis. Three multiple regression models are then developed,

which allow checking the independent effects among the variable criteria used and the three types of learning methods under consideration. The results show that the development of formal and informal learning activities among principals clearly requires a 'learning-friendly' organizational culture, a clear motivation for the profession, a strong professional determination and a positive perception of professional competencies as principals. Schools should start promoting the transition from job-based to competence-based staff systems and structures, in which informal learning strategies become relevant as a basis for promoting innovation (Gomez, et al, 2019).

It could be concluded from the previous related research as song, Bonk, 2016, put it that using emerging technologies such as mobile, wireless, or ubiquitous technology, people can learn in informal and nontraditional ways anywhere and anytime. Such opportunities are important to understand since learners often address that their informal learning activities are more motivating and engaging than formal learning. In effect, informal learning through online resources can change the identity of a learner because of the participatory nature of emerging technologies that have made it possible for people to learn both in and outside the classroom. As technologies transform access to and delivery of learning resources, they have significantly altered an individual's learning and academic paths (song, Bonk, 2016).

Open and distance learning has evolved through different eras of educational, social, and psychological development, which most likely due to the advance of technological developments, particularly information communication technologies that have reshaped teaching and learning with a revolutionary feature provided by the internet technologies. Especially social-constructivist pedagogy, which founds on the personal construction of knowledge through social interaction has drawn attention as an approach that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning, the importance of the social context, the integration of learners into the information communities and theirinclusion in collaborative processes, Taskiran, 2019, in (alsaadat, 2020).

VIII. RESULT

As a result of the above discussion the researcher suggests online self-directed learning model (fig. 1)

IX. CONCLUSION

With the rapid growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web, online learning is becoming an increasingly important mode of education, which allows learners to participate regardless of geographic location, independent of time and place Shen, et al., 2017 said. they continue that There are numerous names for online learning activities such as e learning, web based learning and training, Internet based training, distributed learning, digital collaboration, and distance learning.
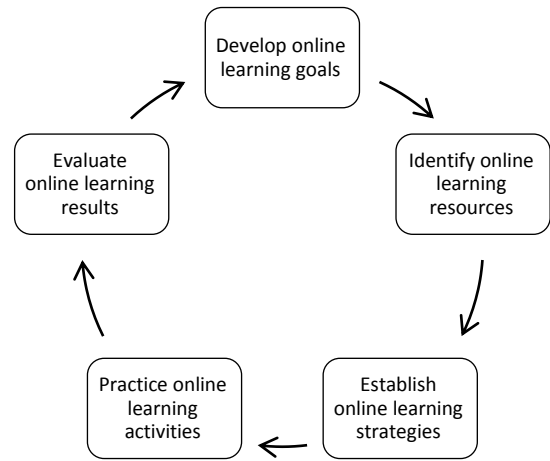

Figure 1. Self directed online learning model

In online learning environments, social negotiation and collaboration are supported through the use of document sharing tools and groupware as well as asynchronous and synchronous communication technology. Recent development of communication technology, especially mobile communication technology, facilitate students' engagement in online education and lead to the emerging of mobile social media learning (Shen et al., 2017). Technology and social media have presented significant tools for adult learners to learn and advance continually. Fast technological advancements have enabled development of technologies used for learning. Expansion of various tools has given professors, educators, trainers, instructors, many alternatives towards the implementation of the technology supported learning (alsaadat, 2018).

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