



## The effect of self-directed learning abilities of student nurses on success in Turkey

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### SUMMARY

SDL—self-directed learning is a learning method used increasingly in adult education. This study was carried out as an instructive effort to examine the effects of SDL on the success of students from nursing school. The sample of this study was composed of 220 students attending in Nursing School of Dokuz Eylül University during the fall semester of 2006. SDL scale including 40 questions was used to obtain the data. Kocaman et al. verified and validated the reliability of scale in Turkey. The data was evaluated by using Pearson correlation analysis. As a result of research, a positive meaningful average relation was found between the points of SDL and success of the students. ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $r = .60$ ).

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### Introduction

SDL is a process in which the person determines his/her learning objective and targets with or without the help of instructors, selects the appropriate research methods and evaluates the learning results. This focus that has been suggested by Knowles (1975) can be qualified as the most comprehensive description.

In terms of literature, the similar descriptions of SDL were made in the following years. When Iwasiw (1987) described SDL as self-planning of a work and taking the responsibility to implement and evaluate the mechanism by the individual, it was reported that Race (1990) described SDL as taking the decision by the student to understand what, when and how. Spencer and Jordan (1999) described SDL as a method used by the students to take the responsibility of their own learning, to determine their aims and learning resources, to deal with appropriate activities and to evaluate their learning results. In scope of all such definitions, taking control of learning and self-evaluation is emphasized as the fundamental characteristics of self-directed learning.

In nursing education, SDL also can increase motivation, confidence, and autonomy, strengthen learning skills and develop interpersonal communication skills (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001; O'Shea, 2003). By considering these effects, nursing students should be equipped with skills for the effective search, analysis, and use of information. The nursing instructors play a significant role at this issue for students to acquire these skills (Lunyk-Child et al., 2001).

Plato and Socrates asked their students to question the life, think about the life process and learn. This Socratic approach formed the basis of today's self-directed learning. After Plato and Socrates,

Dewey was the first to introduce about this approach in 1938 (Dewey, 1938). Knowles, who defined SDL first in 1975, emphasized the importance of SDL as a self learning process in 1980s. As from the first description of SDL until today, SDL was often discussed at educational institutions and several studies were carried out related to its importance and use.

In scope of many researches carried out to determine SDL, it was reported that SDL affected the students and their life (O'Shea, 2003). The individuals with self-directed learning ability can use their knowledge and skills in case of different situations and enhance learning skills during the life time. In addition, it was suggested that SDL ability increased the assertiveness, independence, motivation, and effective use of information (Race, 1990; Charlotte et al., 1998; Lunyk-Child et al., 2001; Williams, 2001; O'Shea, 2003; Kocaman et al., 2003). It was noticed that the learning wish of the students increased due to SDL capacity due to the research carried out by Hewitt-Taylor (2001) similarly to the study of Pedley and Arber (1997).

On the basis of the researches carried out and the feedbacks taken from the students who participated in these researches, it was reported that SDL capacity increased learning motivation and caused the students to develop their own SDL abilities by using the library and computer laboratories except the classrooms (Musall et al., 2001; Boynak, 2004).

The nurses have been working in the most difficult area of the community so they expose to further difficulties to be handled each day as well as vocational requirements to be followed up such as the technological, medical and social developments. Doubtlessly the teaching is ultimately important for nurses who need to adapt these changes and overcome the difficulties (Majumdar, 1999). Therefore, it is emphasized that the methods of SDL have to be taken into consideration as much as high level accomplishments in order to prevent or control the difficult situations in the health industry (Nolan and Nolan, 1997; O'Shea, 2003; Regan, 2003).

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SDL was first involved in the educational curriculum at Case Western University, USA, in 1950s then it was included in the medical curriculum of McMaster University, Canada, in 1960s. The nursing school of McMaster University was the first nursing school that applied the SDL method. In Turkey, SDL began to be taught as a course in the medical school of Dokuz Eylül University during the academic year of 1997–98 and the nursing school in the academic year of 1999–2000 (Kocaman et al., 2003).

The benefits of SDL include the development of skills for an effective research, analysis, and use of education as well as increased motivation and assertiveness. The success indicators such as the student scores on homework, exams, and applications are considered as if related to SDL scores. However, there was no assessment reported in Turkey. The findings of the present study are considered as the guiding principles of nursing education.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the self-directed learning abilities of the students in the nursing school of Dokuz Eylül University and the effects on nursing success.

### Literature Review

The five studies were found related to the effects of self-directed learning on success in literature. According to the reports of Lunyk-Child et al. (2001), Shokar et al. (2002), and Lorenzo and Abbott (2004), it was pointed out that self-directed learning had no positive effect on the achievement level of students. Linarens (1999) pointed out that there was no relation between SDL and achievement level while Chaput and Dunn (1998) were suggesting that a negative relation was found between SDL and achievement level.

According to the research carried out by Lunyk-Child et al. (2001), the perception of 17 students and 47 directors in McMaster University had been reviewed by a focus group of 5–8 persons with semi-structured awareness on SDL. As a result of this study, the students and directors agreed that SDL had the positive effect on performance level.

Shokar et al. (2002) analyzed the relation between the SDL power and the clinical achievement of the third year students in the medical faculty.

The clinical success of the students was determined considering the ongoing evaluation of directors during the internship, clinical performance examination and the written examination results. According to this study, it was observed that there was a positive meaningful relation between the SDL scores and the clinical achievement of the students. ( $r: .74, p < 0.05$ ).

In the study of Lorenzo and Abbott (2004), the achievement level of 81 students who had been educated by SDL methods and 69 students who had a traditional education in the military medical facility were compared.

The level of achievement between 81 students who had been educated by SDL methods and 69 students who had been educated conventionally was compared. The study group ( $n: 81$ ) had been educated by SDL methods for 10 weeks; the control group was educated conventionally. ( $n: 69$ ). As a result of this study, both groups were applied with SDL scale; it was observed that the accomplishment level of the students who had been educated by SDL methods was higher than the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In the study of Chaput and Dunn (1998), the students working in the clinic had been educated by SDL methods for 8 weeks and the relation between the SDL ability and the achievement level of the students was found. A negative relation was observed between the SDL ability and achievement level  $r$  ( $r: -.67$ ). As a result of the study, it was noticed that the student's SDL ability developed, however, the SDL ability was not reflected in the achievement due to lack of motivation and exam preparation.

Similarly, Linarens (1999) reviewed the effects of SDL training on 629 nursing students regarding to the academic achievement levels.

In this study, SDL scale was applied to students therefore, the academic achievement levels were determined by using mean scores of the exams. The results have revealed that SDL ability has a few effects on the academic achievement of students; instead, the success can be increased by individual effort.

On the contrary, the studies that were carried out in Turkey focused on the behavioral characteristics gained by the students and directors with SDL methods, however, no research was carried out to analyze the effects of SDL on the achievement level of students.

### Methods

#### Design

The study was a cross-sectional descriptive correlation study.

#### Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by Dokuz Eylül University Nursing School Ethics Committee. A written consent was taken from each participant before study.

#### Sampling

The study was performed in the nursing school of Dokuz Eylül University during the fall semester of 2006. The sample of the research was composed of 220 students of total 237.

17 students were excluded from the study due to some reasons such as the enrolment problems, absence and inaccurate completion of the questionnaire. 75 students from the 1st year, 56 students from the 2nd year, 48 students from the 3rd year and 41 students from the 4th year were included in the research. The average age of all students who participated in the study was  $X = 20.90 / - 1.94$ .

#### Instruments

A questionnaire including socio-demographic characteristics, scale of self-learning skills and documentation including the end-year grades of students were used as the tools of data collection.

#### Form Including Socio-Demographic Characteristics

This paper was issued by the surveyor including 4 questions e.g. students' name, surname, age and classroom to fill up together with the students during an interview.

#### Self-Directed Learning Ability Scale

Fisher et al. (2001) developed the self-directed learning scale (SDL) to measure SDL ability. Scale of self-directed learning ability can apply to adolescents and adults (Fisher et al., 2001). The application of scale takes 8–10 min and the scale is filled up with students in an interview. The scale is 5-point Likert type. 5-point Likert used in scale includes the following options:

- 1 strongly disagree
- 2 disagree
- 3 neutral
- 4 agree
- 5 strongly agree.

While the original scale was indicating the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient as 0.92, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found as 0.94 as a result of validity and reliability analysis that was carried out by Kocaman et al. (2003) on based of 40 items. We use the scale of 40 items and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found as 0.94.

#### Achievement Levels

The achievement level of the students in the nursing school of Dokuz Eylül University is evaluated based on 100 points.

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