

“Self-directed learning in nursing education: Facilitators and practices.”

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Self-directed learning (SDL) is a crucial component of nursing education, promoting autonomy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning—skills essential for navigating today’s complex healthcare environment. This study was undertaken to explore the existing SDL practices implemented by faculty and to identify the key facilitators influencing SDL among undergraduate and postgraduate nursing students.

Methodology: A descriptive research design with a qualitative approach was adopted. The study was conducted at MGM New Bombay College of Nursing, Kamothe, Navi Mumbai. The sample consisted of 367 participants, including 346 nursing students and 21 faculty members, selected using non-probability convenience sampling. Data were collected using a validated self-structured checklist through Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. **Results:** Findings revealed that over 88% of faculty engaged in implementing SDL strategies such as guiding students in goal setting, providing feedback, and creating a supportive learning environment. Among students, 75.71% reported practicing SDL through goal setting, planning, and reflection. Additionally, 85.71% used digital tools to support their learning. However, only 33.33% utilized feedback effectively, and 57.14% engaged in reflective practices, indicating areas needing improvement in self-monitoring and internal motivation. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that both faculty and students are actively involved in SDL practices. Faculty play a pivotal role in fostering SDL through structured strategies and a supportive academic climate. Nevertheless, there is a need to enhance reflective practices, feedback utilization, and motivational support to optimize SDL in nursing education.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Nursing Education, Faculty Practices, Student Engagement, Reflective Learning, Lifelong Learning, Autonomy.

NEED OF THE STUDY:

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is increasingly recognized as an essential approach in nursing education due to rapid advancements in healthcare, growing patient care complexity, and the need for lifelong learning. Unlike traditional teacher-centered methods, SDL promotes critical thinking, independent decision-making, problem-solving, and continuous professional development by enabling students to identify learning needs, set goals, access appropriate resources, and evaluate their progress. However, effective implementation of SDL is challenged by factors such as limited learner readiness, inadequate faculty support, insufficient guidance, and resource constraints. Identifying the facilitators and best practices that enhance SDL is therefore essential for developing student-centered curricula, strengthening faculty roles as learning facilitators, and fostering evidence-based practice. Supporting this need, Singh (2021) reported that 65% of undergraduate nursing students demonstrated moderate SDL readiness, with motivation, time management, access to learning resources, and faculty support significantly influencing SDL, highlighting the importance of structured educational environments in preparing competent and autonomous nursing professionals.

AIM OF THE STUDY:

To identify and evaluate the facilitators and best practices that promote self-directed learning among nursing students and faculty, with the objective of enhancing student-centred teaching, lifelong learning, and educational outcomes in nursing education.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Explore the existing practices in self-directed learning implemented by the faculty.
2. Identify the facilitators in self-directed learning among nursing students while engaging.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: A qualitative descriptive study was conducted to explore the facilitators and existing practices of self-directed learning (SDL) among nursing students and teaching faculty. A total of 367 participants, comprising undergraduate and postgraduate nursing students and nursing faculty, were recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Data were collected using a self-structured, expert-validated checklist developed from an extensive review of the literature and the study objectives. The instrument consisted of sections assessing demographic characteristics, faculty practices supporting SDL, and facilitators influencing SDL among students. Content validity was established through expert review, and the tool demonstrated high test-retest reliability ($r = 0.87$). Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant characteristics and SDL practices, while inferential statistics were applied to examine associations between study variables, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Section 4.1: Analysis of distribution of sample based on socio- demographic using frequency and percentage.

Table 1: Distribution of sample based on socio-demographic data-Students.

n=346

Demographic Variable	Category	f	%
Age in years	18–23 years	307	88.72%
	24–28 years	28	8.09%
	29–34 years	2	0.57%
	More than 34 years	0	0.00%
Gender	Male	57	83.28%
	Female	284	16.72%
Academic Qualification	B.Sc. Nursing 1st year	108	31.67%
	B.Sc. Nursing 2nd year	100	29.33%
	B.Sc. Nursing 3rd year	50	14.66%
	B.Sc. Nursing 4th year	49	14.36%

	P.B.B.Sc. Nursing 1st year	6	1.76%
	P.B.B.Sc. Nursing 2nd year	20	5.87%
	M.Sc. Nursing 1st year	6	1.76%
	M.Sc. Nursing 2nd year	2	0.59%

Table 1 shows that the majority of students, 307 (88.72%), were aged 18–23 years. Most participants were female, 284 (83.28%). Regarding academic qualification, the majority of students were from B.Sc. Nursing 1st year, 108 (31.67%), followed by B.Sc. Nursing 2nd year, 100 (29.33%).

Section 4.2: Distribution of sample based on socio-demographic using frequency and percentage.

Fig.1: Distribution of sample based on age of facilitators.

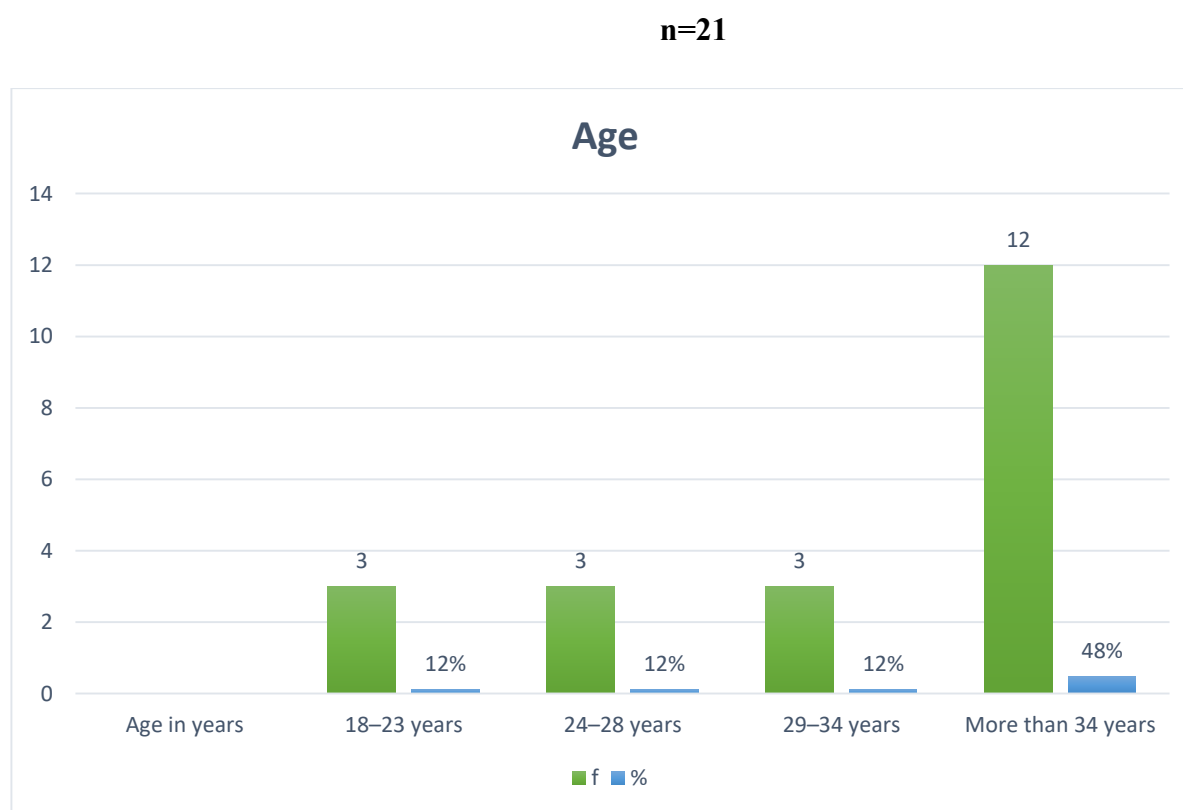


Figure 1. Distribution of age of facilitators

The study involved 21 faculty members, predominantly female (100%) and mostly over 34 years of age (57.1%), indicating an experienced and gender-skewed group. Academically, 47.6% held an M.Sc. in Nursing, 28.6% a Ph.D., and 23.8% a B.Sc., reflecting a highly qualified faculty likely to enhance nursing education and research.

Section 4.2: Distribution of sample based on socio-demographic using frequency and percentage.

Fig.2: Distribution of sample based on gender of facilitators

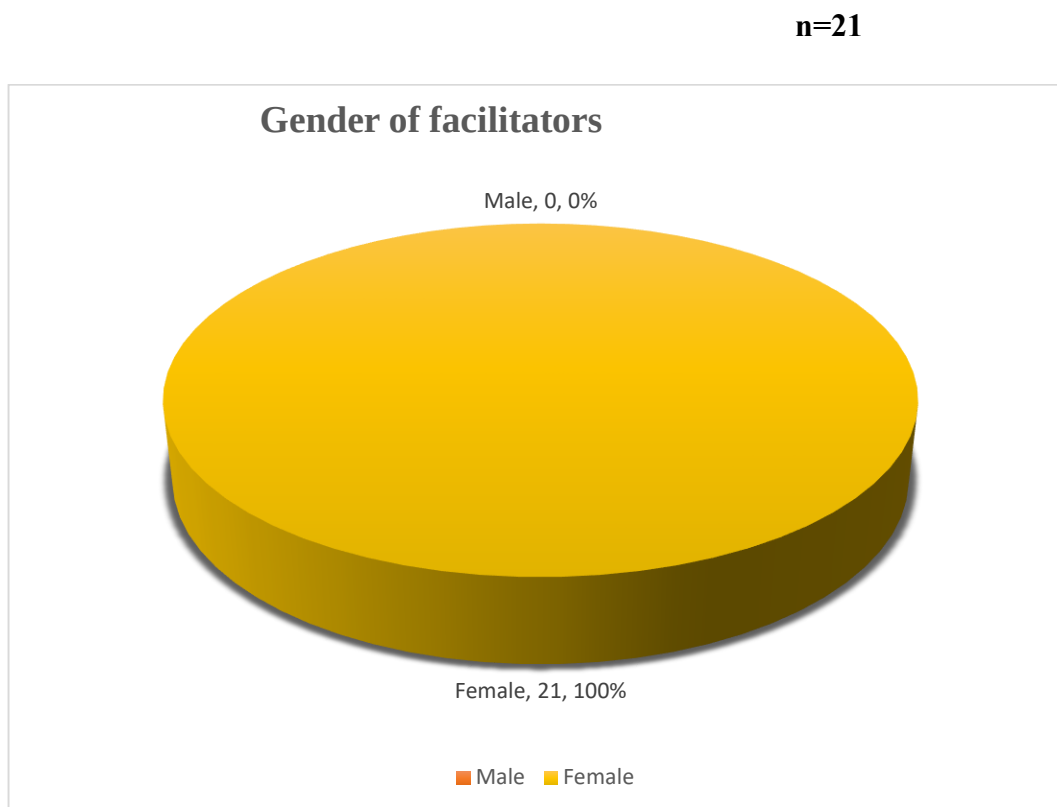


Figure.2 Gender of facilitators

The pie chart illustrates the gender distribution among faculty participants in the study. It shows that:100% (n = 21) of the faculty members who participated in the study were female.0% male participation was recorded. This indicates a completely female-dominated faculty group, which is reflective of the traditional gender distribution in the nursing profession. This may also influence teaching styles and perspectives on self-directed learning, warranting consideration in interpreting faculty-related data.

Section 4.2: Distribution of sample based on socio-demographic using frequency and percentage.

Fig.3: Distribution of sample based on academic qualification of facilitators.

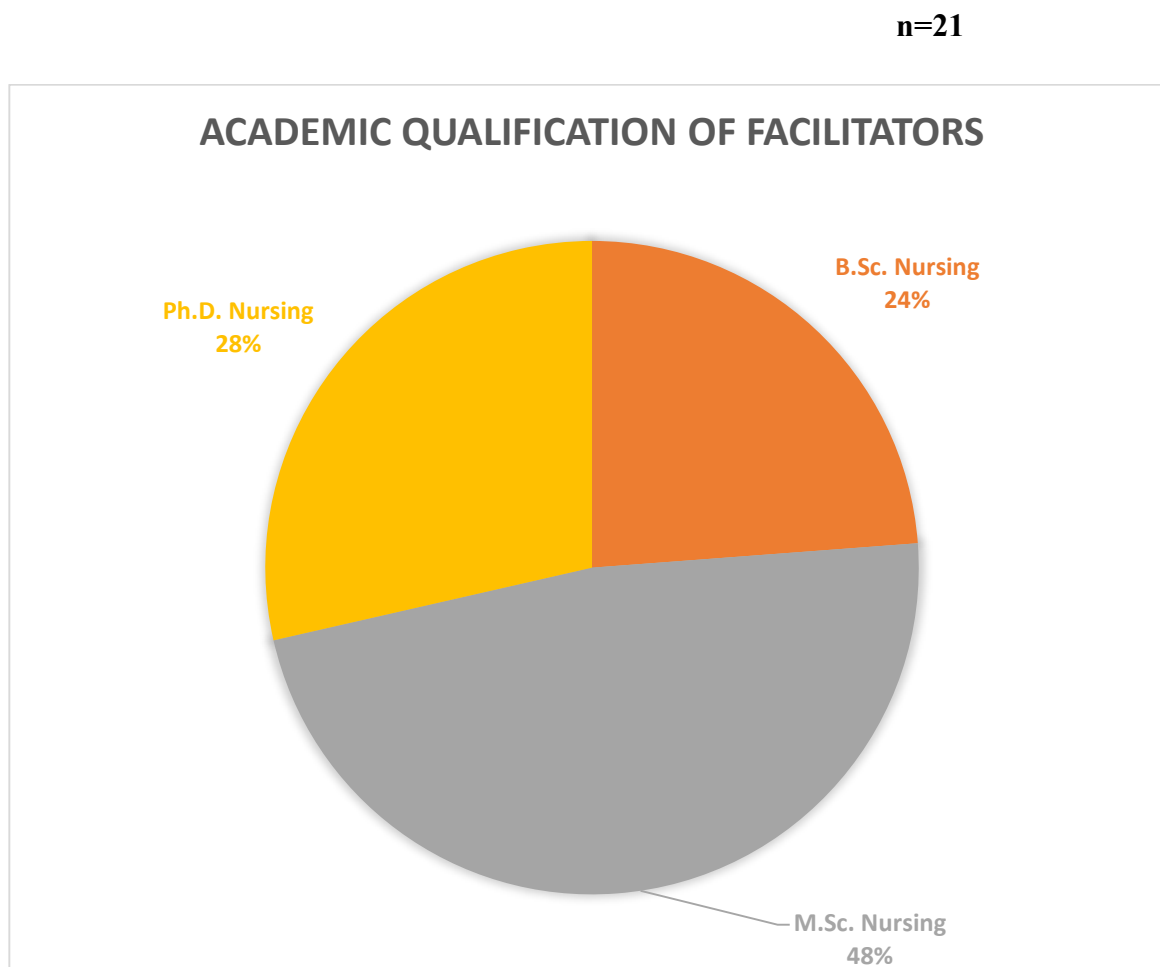


Figure 3. Academic Qualifications of the Facilitators

The pie chart shows that 48% of facilitators hold an M.Sc. Nursing degree, 28% have a Ph.D. in Nursing, and 24% hold a B.Sc. Nursing degree, indicating that the majority of faculty are highly qualified to support self-directed learning in nursing education

Section 4.3: Facilitators in self-directed learning among nursing students while engaging.

Table 2. Analysis of facilitators in self-directed learning.

n=22

Sr.no.	Questions	Yes		No	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	Concept and Process of SDL	69	75.71	36	24.29
2	Resources	55	65.47	29	34.53
3	Electronic concepts	18	85.71	3	14.28

The table indicate that 75.71% of nursing students are engaged in the concept and process of self-directed learning (SDL), such as goal setting, planning, and reflection. About 65.47% utilize available resources like peer support, clinical experiences, and a supportive academic environment, while 34.53% show limited engagement, suggesting a need for improved institutional support. Additionally, 85.71% effectively use digital tools to aid SDL, reflecting strong technological readiness. Overall, the findings highlight that while most students actively participate in SDL, targeted efforts are needed to support those who lack access or motivation.

Section 4.4 Existing practices in self-directed learning implemented by the faculty.

Table 3: Analysis of Existing Practices in self-directed learning implemented by the faculty.

n=22

Sr.no	Questions	Yes		No	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	Achieving learning goals	915	88	123	12
2	Feedback	566	81.79	126	18.21
3	Problem based learning in SDL	564	81.5	128	18.5
4	Encourage to activities participated in SDL.	902	86.89	136	13.10

The table indicates that strong faculty involvement in promoting self-directed learning (SDL). Most faculty (88%) support goal setting and independent tasks, while over 81% provide feedback, suggest learning resources, and use problem-based learning methods. Additionally, 86.89% encourage students to identify learning needs and create a supportive SDL environment. Overall, faculty practices effectively facilitate SDL among students

RESULTS:

Analysis of the collected data was done with the help of inferential and descriptive statistics. The data collected was first coded in to excel sheet. Data is described in term of frequency, percentage.

DISCUSSION:

The present study demonstrated that self-directed learning (SDL) is actively supported in nursing education through both faculty practices and student engagement. The majority of nursing students were young undergraduate learners, while faculty members were experienced and highly qualified, providing a strong foundation for facilitating SDL. Most faculty reported implementing learner-centered teaching strategies, including explaining SDL concepts, guiding students in setting learning goals, providing opportunities for independent learning, offering constructive feedback, recommending learning resources, and incorporating problem-based learning. Similarly, students showed positive engagement in SDL by taking responsibility for their learning, setting personal learning goals, independently accessing learning resources, and effectively utilizing digital technologies. Peer support and a supportive academic environment also emerged as important facilitators, indicating that institutional and social factors play a significant role in promoting autonomous learning among nursing students.

These findings are consistent with Knowles' Theory of Andragogy, which emphasizes that adult learners are self-motivated and capable of directing their own learning, and with Garrison's Self-Directed Learning Model, which highlights self-management, motivation, and self-monitoring as essential components of SDL. While students demonstrated satisfactory skills in planning and managing their learning, comparatively lower utilization of feedback, moderate reflective practices, and limited motivation derived from clinical experiences suggest gaps in self-monitoring and reflective learning. These findings also support Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes reflection as a crucial stage in experiential learning, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which recognizes the influence of supportive learning environments and peer interaction on learner motivation and self-efficacy. Overall, the study suggests that although foundational SDL competencies are well established, strengthening reflective practice, feedback integration, faculty mentorship, and clinical learning experiences could further enhance students' readiness for lifelong learning and evidence-based nursing practice.

CONCLUSION:

The present study concludes that self-directed learning (SDL) is well supported in nursing education through positive faculty practices and active student engagement. Faculty members effectively facilitate SDL by promoting goal setting, independent learning, problem-based learning, and the use of diverse learning resources, while students demonstrate a positive orientation toward self-directed learning through personal responsibility, goal setting, and effective use of digital learning technologies. These findings indicate that a learner-centered educational environment can successfully foster the development of lifelong learning competencies essential for professional nursing practice.

Despite these encouraging findings, gaps remain in students' reflective practice, utilization of feedback, and motivation derived from clinical experiences. Strengthening these aspects through structured mentorship, reflective learning activities, faculty development programmes, and institutional support may further enhance SDL competencies among nursing students. Promoting these strategies within nursing curricula will contribute to preparing competent, independent, and lifelong learners capable of adapting to the evolving demands of contemporary healthcare.

LIMITATIONS:

- This study is limited to undergraduate and post graduate nursing students.
- This study is conducted only in one selected nursing college.

IMPLICATIONS:

Nursing Practice:

The study highlights the importance of encouraging self-directed learning (SDL) among students, which can translate into better clinical decision-making and independent thinking in nursing practice. Nurses trained through SDL are likely to be more proactive, responsible, and confident in-patient care. This approach promotes lifelong learning and ensures that nurses remain updated with the latest practices and guidelines, thereby improving the quality of care.

Nursing Practice:

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Nursing Administration:

Administrators should support faculty development programs that focus on SDL facilitation skills. They can also implement institutional policies that promote a learner-centered approach, providing resources such as e-libraries, online platforms, and simulation labs. Creating an environment that encourages innovation and autonomy in learning will enhance both faculty effectiveness and student outcomes.

Nursing Research:

The study opens avenues for further research on strategies to strengthen SDL among nursing students and faculty. Future research can explore barriers to SDL implementation, the impact of SDL on clinical performance, and the effectiveness of different teaching models. Longitudinal studies can assess how SDL influences professional growth and lifelong learning among nurses over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Replicate the study in other nursing institutions to validate and expand findings.
- Conduct the study with a larger and more diverse sample for broader applicability.
- Organize orientation and training workshops to develop students' time management, self-reflection, and critical thinking abilities.
- Conduct comparative studies to assess the benefits and challenges of SDL in nursing education.
- Further research on the advantages and limitations of SDL in nursing education.

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