

## Self-Directed Learning's Evolving Lexicon

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The literature and its corresponding lexicon are the separating apparatus between disciplines. Such information helps scholars, practitioners, and interested readers to communicate about the knowledge area and its constant development. Hiemstra has long studied self-directed learning's changing lexicon. This research brief describes a more recent examination of SDL literature to determine how the use of various words, terms, concepts, and associated derivatives may have changed in the past two decades.

My interest in the language used to report self-directed learning (SDL) research and describe how that research is discussed began in 1995. Having contributed to that research for several years and noting how various scholars used different words, terms, and acronyms to describe similar concepts and meanings, I began an examination of this phenomenon. I wondered if there was a common language developing from this growing interest in SDL. I carried out this research in time to deliver a paper at the 1996 International Symposium on Self-Directed Learning in West Palm Beach, Florida (Hiemstra, 1997). I examined all the chapters in the eight books emanating from prior symposia (1986-1994) utilizing a modified content analysis to measure (count) the frequency and variety of words used in talking about SDL.

In a follow-up study I analyzed a portion of the eight books emanating from the next SDL symposia (1996-2003). Only 46 of the 151 book chapters were randomly selected because of time and resource limitations. This research was reported in the second issue of the first year of a new journal, the *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning* (Hiemstra, 2004).

I recently completed a third examination of the lexicon. I was motivated to do this during my participation in the 2020 34<sup>th</sup> International Self-Directed Learning Symposium. There I gave the opening keynote presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhoWds61Zo0&t=2706s> – a video version (<https://roghiemstra.com/Balancing%20the%20Inner%20and%20Outer%20Self%20for%20Web.pdf> – a printed version, <https://roghiemstra.com/Presentation%20slide%20show.pdf> – the accompanying slides, and <https://roghiemstra.com/Balancing%20the%20Inner%20and%20Outer%20Self%20Article%20for%20pdf.pdf> – the presentation in a journal article format). During the final symposium session Ralph Brockett and I discussed future research needs for the field during which I mentioned my interest in the field's lexicon (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeTdq28kuSY&t=6s>). In this most recent research I selected 76 of the 131 articles published in the SDL journal from 2004 through 2018 to record the number of times various words, terms, and concepts were used. The only exception to this reading effort was the fact that I excluded my article about the field's lexicon in the 2004, No. 2 issue (Hiemstra, 2004). Following is more detailed information on these chosen issues.

Volume 1 – Number 1 – 2004

contained 6 articles

Volume 1 – Number 2 – 2004	contained 7 articles
Volume 2 – Number 1 – 2005	contained 6 articles
Volume 2 – Number 2 – 2005	contained 8 articles
Volume 5 – Number 1 – 2008	contained 5 articles
Volume 5 – Number 2 – 2008	contained 5 articles
Volume 6 – Number 1 – 2009	contained 5 articles
Volume 6 – Number 2 – 2009	contained 5 articles
Volume 9 – Number 1 – 2012	contained 4 articles
Volume 9 – Number 2 – 2012	contained 4 articles
Volume 10 – Number 1 – 2013	contained 3 articles
Volume 10 – Number 2 – 2013	contained 3 articles
Volume 13 – Number 1 – 2016	contained 3 articles
Volume 13 – Number 2 – 2016	contained 3 articles
Volume 14 – Number 1 – 2017	contained 5 articles
Volume 14 – Number 2 – 2017	contained 4 articles

Following are four portrayals of what I found. The first (Table 1) displays the most frequently used terms for the three examination eras.

Table 1. Most Frequently Used SDL Words and Terms (portrayed alphabetically)

Term, Concept, or Derivative	Frequency 1986-1994 137 Chapters	Frequency 1995-2003 46 Chapters	Frequency 2004-2018 76 articles
Autodidactic	209	12	0
Autonomous learning	92	45	195
Learning environment	0	146	119
Learning projects	231	47	0
OCLI (Oddi, 1984)	102	2	2
Online	*	*	358
SDL	*	*	380
SDLPS (Pilling-Cormick, 1996)	0	273	2
SDLRS (Guglielmino, 1977)	1299	346	105
Self-directed	*	*	852
Self-directed learner	436	67	48
Self-directed learning	2833	1159	682
Self-directed learning readiness	188	151	20
Self-direction in learning	182	163	129
Self-education	105	0	21
Self-efficacy	107	151	138
Self-planned	118	44	18
Self-regulation	38	64	200
Self-taught	109	0	0

\* Terms not included in the first two research periods.

The second portrayal is shown in Figure 1 which reveals the ranking of all 82 terms I discovered. It should be noted that I eliminated any term that was revealed to have been mentioned nine or fewer times in all 76 articles.

*Figure 1: Self-Directed Learning Terms Ranked (each followed by the number of times noted)*

### **Ranked Terms**

[Note: All self-directed learning instruments are shown in Figure 3 and are not in Figure 1]

Self-directed – 852  
 Self-directed learning – 682  
 SDL – 380  
 Online – 358  
 Autonomy – 195  
 Individual – 143  
 Self-efficacy – 138  
 Self-direction – 129  
 Environment – 119  
 Autonomous learning – 117  
 Learner autonomy – 113  
 Coach – 101  
 Motivation – 97  
 Professional development – 80  
 Performance – 73  
 Cognitive – 56  
 Learning environment - 51  
 Competency – 50  
 Self-directed learner(s) – 48  
 Nontraditional – 47  
 Independent – 45  
 CBE – 41 (Competency-based Education)  
 Self-help – 40  
 Mobile devices – 39  
 Reflection – 35  
 Adult learning – 34  
 Homeschool – 34  
 Initiative – 34  
 Responsibility – 34  
 Desire – 33  
 Learning goals – 33  
 Mentor/mentoring – 33  
 SDLL – 33 (Self-Directed Language Learning)  
 Tactical – 33  
 Self-regulation – 30  
 Self-regulated – 29  
 Self-determination – 28  
 Tactic – 28

Collaboration – 26  
Engagement – 26  
Persistence – 25  
Digital – 24  
Internet – 22  
Jolt – 22  
Feedback – 21  
Informal learning – 21  
Lifelong learning – 21  
Resourcefulness – 20  
Satisfaction – 20  
Self-determined – 20  
Facilitate – 19  
Higher education – 19  
Affective – 18  
Learning preference – 18  
Agency – 17 (included personal agency)  
Autonomous – 17  
Coaching – 17  
Self-access – 17  
Collaborative – 16  
Third age – 16  
Learning jolt – 16  
Coaches – 15  
Constructivism – 15  
Facilitator – 15  
Self-access learning center – 15  
Teacher collaboration – 15  
Constructivist – 14  
e-learning – 14  
Informal communication – 14  
Reflective – 14  
Conative – 13  
Connectivism – 13  
Teacher education – 13  
Implicit – 12  
Desired – 11  
Distance learning – 11  
Intrinsic – 11  
Situational – 11  
Agentic – 10  
Autonomous learner – 10  
Locus of control – 10  
Self-regulatory – 10

*Figure 2: Self-Directed Learning Terms Alphabetical (each followed by the number of times noted)*

**Terms Shown Alphabetical**

[Note: All self-directed learning instruments are shown in Figure 3 and are not in Figure 2]

Adult learning – 34  
 Affective – 18  
 Agency – 17)  
 Agentic – 10  
 Autonomous – 17  
 Autonomous learner – 10  
 Autonomous learning – 117  
 Autonomy – 195  
 CBE – 41 (Competency-based education)  
 Coach – 101  
 Coaches – 15  
 Coaching – 17  
 Cognitive – 56  
 Collaboration - 26  
 Collaborative – 16  
 Competency – 50  
 Conative – 13  
 Connectivism – 13  
 Constructivism – 15  
 Constructivist – 14  
 Desire – 33  
 Desired – 11  
 Digital – 24  
 Distance learning – 11  
 e-learning – 14  
 Engagement - 26  
 Environment – 119  
 Facilitate – 19  
 Facilitator – 15  
 Feedback – 21  
 Higher education – 19  
 Homeschool – 34  
 Implicit – 12  
 Independent – 45  
 Individual – 143  
 Informal communication – 14

Informal learning – 21  
Initiative – 34  
Internet – 22  
Intrinsic – 11  
Jolt – 22  
Learner autonomy – 113  
Learning environment – 51  
Learning goals – 33  
Learning jolt – 16  
Learning preference – 18  
Lifelong learning – 21  
Locus of control – 10  
Mentor/mentoring – 33  
Mobile devices – 39  
Motivation – 97  
Nontraditional – 47  
Online – 358  
Performance – 73  
Persistence – 25  
Professional development – 80  
Reflection – 35  
Reflective – 14  
Resourcefulness – 20  
Responsibility – 34  
Satisfaction – 20  
SDL – 380  
SDLL – 33 (Self-directed language learning)  
Self-access – 17  
Self-access learning center – 15  
Self-determination – 28  
Self-determined – 20  
Self-directed – 852  
Self-directed learner(s) – 48  
Self-directed learning – 682  
Self-direction – 129  
Self-efficacy – 138  
Self-help – 40  
Self-regulated – 29  
Self-regulation – 30  
Self-regulatory – 10  
Situational – 11  
Tactic – 28  
Tactical – 33  
Teacher collaboration – 15  
Teacher education – 13  
Third age – 16

The various instruments used in SDL research are mentioned many times in the most recent literature studied except for two instruments. Figure 3 portrays this information with the number of times mentioned, the title of the instrument, and a bibliographic citations for anyone seeking additional information.

*Figure 3: Self-Directed Learning Instruments (not included in Figures 1 and 2)*

### **Instrument Labels Shown Alphabetical**

ALA – 98 (Appraisal of Learner Autonomy) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 ILD – 47 (Inventory of Learner Desire) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 ILI – 31 (Inventory of Learner Initiative) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 ILP – 31 (Inventory of Learner Persistence) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 ILR – 31 (Inventory of Learner Resourcefulness) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 LAP – 223 (Learner Autonomy Profile) (Ponton & Carr, 2016)  
 OCLI – 2 (Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory) (Oddi, 1984) (included because of its earlier popularity)  
 OLRs – 12 (Online learning readiness survey) (Dray, Lowenthal, Miskiewicz, Primo, & Marczyński, 2011)  
 SDLPS – 2 (Self-Directed Learning Perception Scale) (included because of its earlier popularity) (Pilling-Cormick, 1996)  
 SDLRS – 125 (Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale) (Guglielmino, 1977)

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