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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL****MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**TOWARDS INDEPENDENT LEARNING: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF G.
GROW'S STAGED SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING MODEL****Dilafruz Sarimsakova***Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of Uzbekistan**State World Languages University*dilafruzsarimsakova@uzswlu.uz*Tashkent, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: independent learning, learner readiness, learner responsibility, Staged Self-Directed Learning Model.

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical foundations of Gerald Grow's Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) Model through a literature review and conceptual analysis. It explores the relationship between students' readiness for independent learning and instructional guidance, changes in teacher roles, and students' gradual assumption of responsibility for their own learning. The model's four stages are described in terms of students' involvement in setting learning goals, selecting resources, organising learning activities, and evaluating outcomes, alongside the teacher's responsibilities within this process. The stages are interpreted in relation to students' readiness, prior learning experience, and the demands of particular tasks. The model's theoretical significance lies in explaining independent learning through the distribution of responsibility between teachers and students and clarifying the role of consultation and collaboration in developing students' capacity to manage their own learning.

Introduction. Independent learning is an important concern in higher education because students are expected to assume responsibility for activities that extend beyond direct instruction. However, working without the teacher's immediate presence does not necessarily involve directing one's learning. Students may complete prescribed tasks while having little

responsibility for identifying needs, selecting resources, or evaluating outcomes. The distinction between the organisation of independent study and the capacity for self-direction is therefore theoretically significant (Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991; Loeng, 2020).

In credit-modular education, this distinction directs attention to the relationship between independent workload and students' readiness to manage learning. Allocating study time defines an organisational requirement; it does not explain how responsibility develops. Grow's (1991) Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) Model addresses this problem by relating degrees of learner self-direction to different teacher roles. It provides a basis for examining how instructional guidance can contribute to independence rather than assuming that independence follows automatically from reduced teacher involvement.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the model's theoretical assumptions, its account of student responsibility, and the limitations of its use in higher education. Three questions guide the discussion: (1) How does the model explain the movement towards independent learning? (2) How can teachers translate its stages into observable opportunities for student responsibility? (3) What qualifications are necessary when using the model to organise and assess independent study? These questions are addressed conceptually through the relationship between learner readiness, instructional control, and the interpretation of independence.

Literature Review

Independent learning and self-direction

Self-directed learning concerns the learner's initiative and responsibility within the learning process (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Merriam, 2001). Loeng (2020) emphasises that the concept has several interpretations and cannot be reduced to studying alone. His review also draws attention to the difference between having opportunities for autonomous action and possessing the capacity to use them. Accordingly, independence involves more than the external freedom to choose: it also requires the ability to make educationally meaningful decisions.

Grow (1991) approaches self-direction primarily through teaching. His concern is the degree of responsibility learners can assume within an instructional relationship and how teachers can support its development. This emphasis is especially relevant to formal education, where students exercise agency within a curriculum rather than outside all institutional requirements. Self-direction consequently admits degrees and can coexist with expert guidance (Grow, 1991, 1994).

Independent learning denotes the broader educational aim of developing students' capacity to manage their learning, while self-directed learning identifies the dimension of initiative and control examined in Grow's model. This analytical distinction avoids equating independent study arrangements with self-direction. A task completed individually may still be largely teacher-directed if its goals, procedures, and evaluative decisions remain externally determined.

Self-direction and self-regulation

Loyens et al. (2008) distinguish self-directed learning from self-regulated learning through the learner's role in defining the learning task. Self-regulation can occur while pursuing goals established by a teacher; self-direction gives learners a broader role in identifying learning needs and selecting learning materials. The distinction matters because effective management of an assigned task does not necessarily indicate responsibility for determining what should be learned.

Garrison (1997) conceptualises self-directed learning through the interrelationship of self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation. His model connects control over the learning situation with responsibility for understanding. These dimensions complement Grow's focus on the teacher-learner relationship: a change in who manages learning is meaningful only when accompanied by the learner's capacity to monitor its quality. This conceptual connection does not imply that the two models describe identical processes or validate one another.

The literature therefore supports examining both the scope of learner control and the capacities through which that control is exercised. Grow's model contributes a staged account of instructional relationships, whereas the distinction developed by Loyens et al. (2008) clarifies why participation in defining learning is relevant to self-direction. Together, these perspectives help distinguish the completion of independent work from the development of responsibility for learning.

Methodology. The study uses a focused narrative literature review and conceptual analysis. Grow's original article (1991), subsequent clarification (1994), and expanded online text (1996) form the primary basis of the analysis. Selected contributions by Garrison (1997), Loyens et al. (2008), and Loeng (2020) clarify related concepts. The theoretical perspectives are compared in relation to the three research questions: developmental progression, the distribution of responsibility, and interpretive limitations. The analysis synthesises theoretical

propositions and does not report an empirical intervention or claim exhaustive coverage of the literature.

Theoretical Analysis and Discussion

Progression towards independent learning

The SSDL model explains progression towards independent learning through the gradual transfer of learning responsibility from the teacher to the learner. Drawing on situational leadership, Grow (1991) proposes that teaching should respond to learners' readiness for self-direction while helping them develop greater control. Readiness is related to the particular learning situation; a student may be capable of independent activity in one area and require substantial direction in another (Pratt, 1988). The model consequently treats the appropriateness of teaching as relational rather than as a property of one universally preferable method.

At Stage 1, the dependent learner relies on the teacher as an authority and coach. Direction provides the organisation and subject-specific support that the learner cannot yet supply independently. Grow (1991) does not treat this dependency as an inherent intellectual deficiency. Its theoretical significance lies in the distinction between guidance that enables learning and guidance that indefinitely retains responsibility with the teacher. Initial structure can contribute to independence when it prepares learners to undertake decisions they previously depended on others to make.

At Stage 2, the interested learner shows willingness to participate but continues to require guidance. The teacher functions as a motivator and guide, explaining purposes and supporting the development of goals and learning strategies. Interest is therefore distinguished from a fully developed capacity for self-direction. The transition involves an emerging understanding of how learning can be organised, while external support remains substantial (Grow, 1991).

At Stage 3, the involved learner participates more actively in planning and implementing learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator, and decision-making becomes increasingly shared. This stage highlights the social character of developing independence: responsibility can be negotiated through interaction with teachers and peers. Involvement becomes developmentally significant when students contribute to the direction of learning rather than merely participating in activities designed entirely by others (Grow, 1991).

At Stage 4, the self-directed learner assumes substantial responsibility for learning goals, resources, implementation, and evaluation. The teacher becomes a consultant or delegator.

Expert assistance remains available, but the learner increasingly determines when and why it is needed. Self-direction therefore concerns the purposeful use of support, not the elimination of relationships with knowledgeable others (Grow, 1991, 1994).

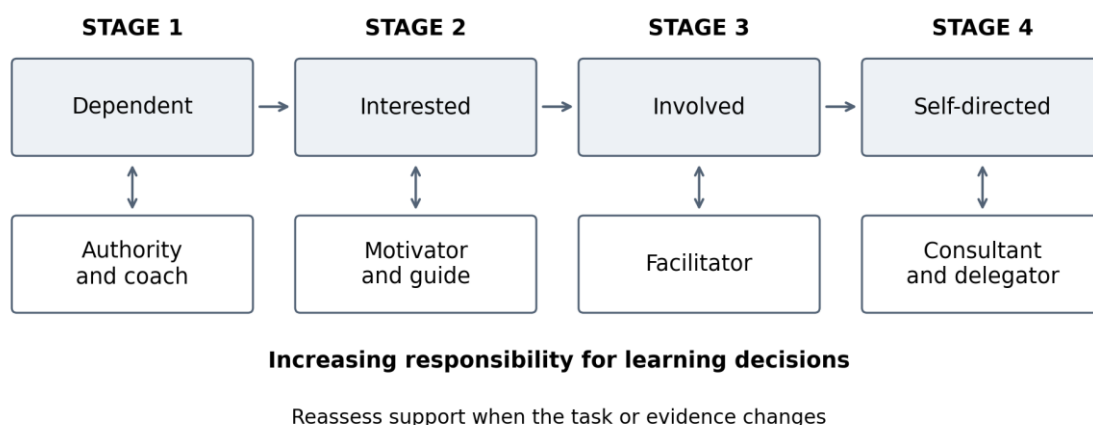


Figure 1: Learner readiness and teacher roles in the SSDL model

The developmental logic connecting these stages is the gradual redistribution of responsibility. However, the model does not establish that every learner passes through the stages in a fixed order or at the same pace. Grow's (1994) clarification gives particular importance to the situational nature of self-direction and to teaching that can either respond to existing readiness or encourage its development. Progression is thus best understood as a change in the learner's relationship to control and support, rather than an automatic consequence of age or academic advancement.

Teacher roles and student responsibility

The model's stages provide increasing opportunities for learners to assume responsibility for their learning. The theoretical shift is from decisions made predominantly for students to decisions increasingly made with and by them. Grow's (1991) changing teacher roles describe this redistribution, while Loyens et al. (2008) clarify why control over the definition of learning matters alongside control over its execution.

Within a predominantly directive relationship, the teacher establishes the learning purpose and the route towards it. As readiness develops, students acquire a greater role in formulating goals, choosing resources and strategies, and interpreting their progress. These functions give observable meaning to responsibility: the issue is whether students make and explain consequential learning decisions, rather than simply complete the required work. This is a conceptual implication of the model, not a separate stage-assessment instrument.

The distinction between participating in an activity and directing learning is particularly important. Students can be active while the teacher retains all significant decisions. Equally, they can take responsibility within a shared learning process. Grow's (1991) account of involved and self-directed learners permits collaborative relationships, and Loyens et al. (2008) explicitly distinguish self-direction from unguided individual learning. Collaboration and independence are therefore compatible when learners retain responsibility for their contributions and choices.

The teacher's developmental role also involves more than matching established preferences. If instruction always accommodates dependence, opportunities to assume responsibility may remain limited. Grow (1994) acknowledges that a carefully introduced mismatch between existing readiness and the demands of instruction can encourage development. The relevant principle is a supported extension of responsibility: the learner encounters decisions beyond current habits while retaining access to the knowledge and assistance needed to address them.

Garrison's (1997) distinction between self-management and self-monitoring helps explain why transferring control alone is insufficient. Organising activity and examining understanding are related but distinguishable responsibilities. A theoretical account of independence should therefore consider both who directs learning and how the learner judges its adequacy. Grow's contribution is to position the teacher's changing role within this development, without implying that consultation ceases once learners become self-directed.

Limitations of interpretation

Using the model to organise and assess independent study requires careful consideration of its assumptions and limitations. The first is to avoid treating the stages as fixed student identities. Grow (1991, 1994) recognises that the capacity for self-direction varies with the situation. A stage description should therefore refer to the learner's relationship with a particular demand rather than provide a general judgment of ability or maturity.

The second qualification concerns diagnosis. In the supplementary discussion of the theoretical basis, Grow (1996) acknowledges the absence of a reliable method for determining a learner's stage. The categories consequently cannot, by themselves, justify precise classifications or numerical scores. Assessing independent study requires distinguishing the quality of the completed work from the degree of control exercised in producing it. The SSDL model identifies that distinction conceptually but does not supply a validated procedure for measuring it.

A third limitation concerns the timing and direction of transitions. The model offers a rationale for changing instructional roles without specifying universal thresholds for doing so. Grow (1994) also accepts that some mismatches may be productive, which qualifies a rigid interpretation of matching. Theoretical consistency therefore requires recognising both the need to respond to readiness and the possibility of extending it. Neither permanent accommodation nor indiscriminate withdrawal of support adequately expresses this relationship.

Finally, self-direction should not be equated with complete freedom from institutional or social conditions (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Formal learning involves curricular purposes and disciplinary standards, while learners may depend on collaboration and expert knowledge. Grow's (1991) account of consultation at Stage 4 allows continuing assistance within self-directed activity. Independence concerns the learner's increasing responsibility within these relationships, not a condition in which all educational decisions become individual or unconstrained.

These qualifications define the model's explanatory scope. It offers a theoretical account of how instruction and learner responsibility can be related, but the usefulness of its categories does not itself establish their empirical validity. The present analysis is limited to selected theoretical sources and cannot determine the model's effectiveness across disciplines or institutional settings. Its contribution is to clarify the conditions under which a staged interpretation of self-direction remains conceptually defensible.

Conclusion. The analysis provides three responses to the research questions. First, Grow's SSDL model explains movement towards independent learning through the gradual transfer of responsibility, supported by instruction that responds to situational readiness. Its stages represent changing relationships between learners and support rather than a universal sequence of development. Second, the teacher's roles from authority and coach to consultant and delegator, create opportunities for students to assume responsibility for goals, resources, strategies, and evaluation. Independence becomes evident in the scope and quality of these decisions, including the purposeful use of assistance. Third, the model requires cautious interpretation because stage identification is not supported by a validated diagnostic procedure, transitions have no universal timetable, and self-direction remains sensitive to context. Within these limits, its theoretical significance lies in explaining how guidance can contribute to learner agency. For higher education, including credit-modular programmes, the

model directs attention from the allocation of independent work towards the development of students' capacity to take responsibility for learning.

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