SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING THROUGH YOUTUBE: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND TRENDS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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ABSTRACT

Self-directed learning has dramatically altered the landscape of education through digital disruption of social media sites. The growing need for self-directed learning led to the rise of YouTube as a global platform for learning and knowledge sharing. The study focuses on high lighting challenges, trends, and exploring the opportunities of YouTube as a tool to facilitate self-directed learning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The prime reason to choose UAE is that the country is a hub of numerous nationalities providing a diverse perspective and is currently in the process of developing self-directed learning methods for students. The data was gathered through qualitative methodology using a focus group approach. A total of 1525 higher education students participated in the focus group sessions. The findings of the study revealed that YouTube plays a vital role in encouraging self-directed learning among the learners in UAE. The study also provides a knowledge base for further research on customized learning processing.

KEYWORDS: Self-Directed Learning, YouTube, Social Media Learning, Learning, and Development & Distance Learning

INTRODUCTION

The changing landscape of education, digital disruption, the proliferation of social media sites, and the growing need for self-directed learning lead to the rise of YouTube as a platform for learning and knowledge sharing. This video sharing platform is distinct from its other social network counterparts, like Facebook and Instagram, and has minimalistic social interaction (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). YouTube has played a significant role in fostering informal and self-directed learning in numerous areas (Rosenthal, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). It empowers the users to create, upload, and share videos on the social media platform and is being increasingly used by the learners to watch videos that are not just for entertainment purposes but also are educational. The viewers find the videos on the YouTube engaging and of high educational value that increments learning. The integration of digital forms into learning fosters education in the digital age (Ifenthaler & Tracey, 2016). In recent times, social media has been viewed as a tool that effectively supplements conventional teaching methods (Buzzetto-More, 2012). YouTube is one of those social media platforms that are easily accessible to the viewers, is free of cost, and considered to be user-friendly. This interactive platform provides a large variety of videos that can be conveniently uploaded and downloaded by the users. Besides providing entertainment to its viewers, YouTube is believed to render boundless learning opportunities to digital learners. In the era of digitization and technological advancement, there has been an increased reliance on YouTube for seeking self-directed learning requirements. Bonk (2008), in his study, found that YouTube maximizes learning of language courses like EFL/ESL. However, there is a dearth of academic literature...
focused on learning through YouTube (Gbolahan, 2017). YouTube is a free learning platform which can be easily accessed on PC’s, tablets and smart mobiles. In this era of digitalization most of the people have their access to internet and smart devices so this makes easier for them to get connected to this ultimate source of learning and entertainment. According to the surveys and reports received by YouTube it is evident that more than 2 billion users visit this website daily with 35 hours of videos being uploaded and downloaded every minute. So, this makes YouTube the most used video website which is easily accessible for every age group (Litcher, 2012).

According to some researchers it is evident that YouTube plays a vital role in self-directed learning (Lee, Osop, Goh & Kelni, 2017). The simple approach to video content have made videos a preferable way of learning (Shah, 2017). YouTube being an online video sharing medium has been voted as the best tool for learning in comparison between 200 tools for learning in 2016 and 2017, and this platform has remained at the top position for being the best medium for video based learning from 2009 to 2017 (Halt, 2017). Online video-based learning basically using YouTube provides a user-friendly access for formal and informal learning by viewing up to date content in different areas of health science, art, social science humanities and all other subjects (Kousha, Thelwall, & Abdoli, 2012). Furthermore, YouTube helps the users to learn from their own comfort zone and to be in charge of their own learning using self-directed learning theory (Lee, Osop, Goh & Kelni, 2017). Learning through multimedia channels displaying videos is an effective measure to enhance learner’s knowledge (Zahn, Pea, Hesse & Rosen, 2010). The use of videos in learning brought huge educational advantages (Willmot et al., 2011). It is considered that YouTube is an interesting tool that helps to enhance social abilities and contributes to worldwide education (Duffy, 2008). Videos can enhance student’s interactivity thus helps to promote social training (Hong & Nguyen, 2014). YouTube can be accessed in 76 different languages and this makes it the most commonly used social media website to access videos (Samuel, Alotaibi & Loazano, 2017). The main feature of YouTube is that it allows the users to comment, suggest and give reasons about their response for liking or disliking the video which helps the YouTuber to create the content that is liked by public (Moran, Seaman & Kane, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Directed Learning (SDL), also known as autonomous learning, refers to the learning process where “individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975). This form of learning is deep-rooted in adult learning and is attributed to self-control and self-management practiced by the learner to assess, control, and regulate the learning process, thus increasing its effectiveness (Bolhuis, 1996; Garrison, 1997). Self-directed learning emphasizes the learner’s attribute, process, and goal of learning that includes making the learner autonomous, advocate emancipative, and fosters transformational learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the factors that create a conducive self-directed learning environment.

Essentials of Web Based Learning

Internet based learning methods require rethinking about the facts, theories, situations and evaluations drawn from them. It is very important to learn self-directed learning skills during web based learnings as compared to other methods of learning (Wijekumar, Ferguson & Wagoner, 2006). There are two types of online learning: Self paced learning, instructor led learning (Manochehri, 2008). Users should have good computer literacy and knowledge to get a fine grip during self-directed learning.
Dimensions for Self-Directed Learning

There are four dimensions for self-directed learning:

- **Control Dimension**
  This dimension is based on how the learner is going to direct the process of his learning. Basically, this dimension involves the planning process in which the learner decides the process of his learning.

- **Initiative Dimension**
  This dimension involves the decision of steps that are required to be taken during the whole process.

- **Motivation Dimension**
  This dimension includes the motivation and desire of the learner to take the necessary steps for the learning process.

- **Self-Efficacy Dimension**
  The last step involves learner’s confidence on his learning skills to get a productive conclusion of his learning (Lee, Osop, Goh & Kelni, 2017).

The expectancy of self-directed learning is that the student undertakes the prime charge for his own learning depending on the unique requirements and personal objectives. Self-Directed Learning is a complicated process and it includes a series of perceptive reasoning, decision making abilities and learning practices (Beach, 2017).

Self-Directed Learning enables the learners to develop their personal and professional skills by developing the learning skills according to their educational needs. It is a solid pillar of their educational success. It is reported that SDL had 84% success rate whereas, traditional learning has 64% success rate (Hernán, et al., 2019). The opinions, abilities and personal attributes of learners skilled in Self-Directed Learning direct to the growth of self-confidence and a desire for learning. Learners, thus, undertake accountability of their personal learning, while instructors dynamically convey and discuss thoughts with them, deliver resources and authenticate outcomes during this method. Briefly Self-Directed Learning is considered as a medium of training which positively lead to life-long learning process. (Fisher, King & Tague, 2001).

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING USING YOUTUBE

With the emergence of YouTube on the internet, YouTube had already a major social, political and cultural impact. Common people can easily grab the attention of the entire world by showing their talent and innovative ideas. Educationally, it is important for YouTubers to evaluate video responses as it is a dialectical learning process attained through their active communication. Basically, YouTube has provided the users some significant moments to understand their contribution and to consider their involvement in YouTube, which would be a learning moment like self-reflection. By spreading opinions about the future of YouTube, YouTubers are active in building educational democracy through problem-solving processes, by learning and doing. Thus, this rhetorical process of discussing the YouTube content, created by ordinary consumers helps to discuss the future of YouTube, indicates the possibility of restoring the public sphere of Habermas where ordinary people can freely participate in independent debates (Kellner & Kim, 2010).

YouTube has become popular choice for internet users and has encouraged many people to produce and upload the...
content which may be useful for other users too. Many research scholars utilize this platform for their research purpose (Ham & Schnabel, 2011). YouTube can be used to explain the subject material, involve learners to explore information and advanced methods for learning. This platform could also be used by learners to share and discuss their videos on other platforms as well, and this method helps in group based learning (Agazio & Buckley, 2009).

During web-based learning, user is totally independent to select the time and material to commence the study which enhances the interest of the learner (Tullis & Benjamin, 2011).

The choice of content and material allows the learner to choose and switch between according to the learning needs and provides a wide platform to proceed in the way of learning (Klois, Segers & Verhoeven, 2013).

YouTube user needs critical awareness and active participation for educational and political use. So, technological innovation in YouTube provides learning opportunities that can be progressive. The actual use of this technology by individual users will ultimately determine its practical potential for educational learning and social change. As discussed, the ongoing use of Internet technology from YouTubers demonstrates core values of critical pedagogy, which includes learning by doing, communication knowledge, learning for agency, and learning to adapt social change. However, without a clear critical vision, YouTube can simply become just a game of individual enjoyment (Kellner & Kim, 2010).

Therefore, it is important assess both the capabilities and limits of new forms of online educational platforms. Education settings in general should include extensive educational efforts to critically examine and integrate new media technologies (Kahn & Kellner, 2005). Media in this technological era has opened room for people to practice media education performance / self-awareness and social change. As an achievement of the multifaceted potential of individuals in terms of learning, YouTube provides individuals with instant expression and personal development. Being a productive medium in terms of learning, YouTube offers a chance to reflect the ideals of personal freedom, social responsibility, political involvement in daily routine. This depends on how the critical learning is applied to the new media. YouTube could be either a storehouse of relevant information, or another nursery in a commercial leisure house. Finally, for instructors, it is imperative to acquire innovative media education that will facilitate learners to achieve progressive learning (Kellner & Share, 2007).

YouTube is considered to have three kinds of affordance:

- Information affordance: This behavior allows the user to search the material required to commence the learning.
- Demonstration affordance: This behavior allows to select the material from YouTube which the learner is going to use during his/her learning phase.
- Open-ended constructivist affordance: This allows the interaction between different people studying the same content to discuss their queries and suggestions (Szeto & Cheng, 2013).

YouTube is considered as a time-wasting application but if it is used carefully, a large amount of educational information could be retrieved. The progress of educational videos depends on the number of people viewing the videos and the viewership is increasing on daily basis (Duncan, Ross & Haigh, 2013).

The main advantage of using YouTube for learning is this generation is exposed to digital environment from a very early age. YouTube being a very popular social site, it has a lot of users and is already being used as formal or informal learning source. Most of the educational institutes have their recognized YouTube channels from where the learners can get information required to proceed their self-directed learning. Learners can access the information at any time or any place that...
is feasible for them because of the easy internet access and smart devices. So, through sharing of the videos and discussions learners master the art of critical thinking and knowledge. It is very essential to use suitable videos for this purpose so, through two-way discussions learners can present their opinion and ideas. There must be clear knowledge of the Internet and computer literacy in order to use YouTube as a teaching and learning resource. The requirement to acquire learning abilities which will be lasting for lifetime is a feature of critical learning. It is evident that learners need to acquire critical learning approach to use YouTube as a learning tool (Clifton & Mann, 2011).

Videos can become influential learning tool to achieve learning objectives. Learners are gradually using YouTube as a step-by-step resource, for educational videos to online spaces for sharing user developed content (Roodt & Villiers, 2011).

Web based learning mediums including YouTube, provide information in a way that eliminates time, place, and situational hinderances (Kanuka & Nocente, 2003). Self-Learning from YouTube helps to develop social skills and plays a vital role in worldwide education. As it allows the leaners to reproduce the knowledge they have learned with the addition of their own concepts. So, this makes learners to become teachers as well at the same platform (Bonk, 2009).

While using YouTube as Self-Learning tool, audio and video representations develop learner’s interest and keeps the learner engaged during whole learning process with a variety of material available related to the subject. Learner has different options to choose during the learning process related to the specific subject. YouTube also opens doors for additional recommended videos on topics related to the subject giving a vast space for life-long learning (Berk, 2009). In this technological era learners are motivated by visual experiences and by doing multi-tasking by the usage of multimedia and audio-video platforms (Greenberg & Zanetis, 2012). While learning through videos, both hemispheres of the brain are used. The left hemisphere is used to process language which allows the learner to process discussions, words and situations whereas the right hemisphere allows to process the pictures, colors, music effects and tunes. Human beings can learn through visuals, reading and listening. Videos enable the learners to activate human brain’s core intelligence (Jones & Cuthrell, 2011). The main advantage of using YouTube for learning is, this medium is open for anyone having internet access and PC, Tablets, Laptops or smart phones. This platform allows beginners as well as professionals to view or upload the video content. Prior experience is not a requirement and mostly beginners come with new ideas and innovations as there is a chance for improvement and suggestions (Pokharel, 2014). Several studies suggest that self-directed learning in visual plus audio form is easy to understand and remember than only in audio form. YouTube provides vast variety of videos to learn in the process of Self-Directed Learning (Berk, 2009).

One such study is that of Bouchard (2009) that scrutinized four critical dimensions of learning, namely- algorithmic, conative, semiotic, and economic- and bolstered the application of the multi-dimensional model (Figure 1) to foster self-directed learning. Autonomous learning highly depends on the motivation of the learner, and videos play an essential role in attracting the attention of learners and helping them comprehend difficult concepts (Mayer, 2001). One such platform that encourages and stimulates independent learning is YouTube (Hafner, & Miller 2011).
YouTube is defined as a platform “where transmedia competencies are being developed outside formal learning environments” and information, opinion, and knowledge or opinions, thus influencing the behavior and social dynamics (Scolari, 2018). YouTube, a video sharing service launched in 2005, boasts to have approximately 1.9 billion viewers in 2019 with 250 million hours viewed each day on television screens (Iqbal, 2019). According to the research conducted by ‘We Are Flint’ in 2018 to gauge the social media usage of 2007 U.S. adults and 2008 U.K., YouTube was found to be one of the most used social media network (We Are Flint, 2018). Contrary to the other social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) that are based on high social interaction, YouTube facilitates more content sharing and less virtual socializing (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

Another research indicated that 73 percent of adults in the United States are YouTube users (Pew Research Center, 2019). YouTube became the most popular platform for sharing not just mere entertainment and music videos but also several significant educational, research, medical and knowledge sharing (Duncan et al., 2013). Learners of all nuance started looking up to YouTube for meaningful learning, particularly the self-directed one. Myriads of studies highlighting the role of YouTube in effectively engaging the learners and facilitating different styles of learning were conducted (Abendroth et al. 2012; Chen, 2013; Jackman & Roberts, 2014). YouTube also became popular for its instructional videos on creating things and fixing the household item (VidStatsX, 2014). Among other benefits of this platform was the fact that it fostered collaborative learning by encouraging the learners to post and share insightful content (Vogt-Schuller, 2014).

Figure 1: Autonomous Learning Strategies.

Source: Adapted from Bouchard, P (2009).

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Figure 2: Top Six Networks by Usage per Age Group in U.K. and USA (2018).

Reasons for using YouTube

The growing usage of YouTube is driven by various motives. A study conducted by Khan (2017) on the university students in the U.S. revealed that students tend to share links of the video with a motive to share information, whereas the content consumption was driven by the need for entertainment and relaxation. However, the need for seeking information and fostering learning stimulated the students and the general public to watch YouTube in addition to other available sources (Klobas et al., 2018). Several reasons contributed to the increasing use of YouTube as a self-directed learning tool. First of all, YouTube is a platform where the users can create the content of their videos and share these videos without charging the learner. Providing free videos has significantly increased the popularity of using YouTube over time (Shifman, 2012; Lee & Lehto, 2013). In addition to free videos, YouTube provides search channels that the user can select learning resources based on their requirements at a satisfactory level (Tay & Low, 2017). YouTube has changed the way of learning from a physical classroom environment to an online learning platform (Yadav et al., 2017). This new form of learning created convenient, quick, and efficient access to the relevant tutorials, daily lesson videos, and online classes, which is also an essential factor in the use of YouTube as a self-directed learning tool (Pradeep, 2019). While learning through YouTube is now supported by a considerable amount of countries around the world, it still does not mean that conventional classroom learning is replaced by internet-based learning (Lawson & Murray, 2018; Yadav et al., 2017).

Trends

YouTube (2020) has announced that it has more than two billion users, which is one-third of internet users. Every day, one billion hours have been spent on YouTube by mainly people between 18 and 34 years-old across 100 countries and available in 80 different languages (YouTube, 2020). These trends show that there is a great opportunity on YouTube for self-directed learning. A study conducted in India, students from Science and Commerce subjects, showed that Science students were more likely to use practical application videos while Commerce students were using online tutorials in exam preparations (Naidu, 2018). There are also examples of learning the English language or learning computer through YouTube videos (Malison & Thammakoranonta, 2018). On the other hand, "corporate YouTube" provides an online library environment for employees to have access to their job-specific training for self-development. This practice leverages the learning experience through the visual videos rather than handbooks. Moreover, it reduces the training costs to the organizations due to the replacement of on-location events with online environment (Bixhorn, 2018).
Opportunity

Youtube is now a trend among secondary and higher secondary students to use smart devices such as phones and tablets for self-directed learning (Hasan et al., 2016). This trend creates an opportunity for YouTube to capture this market segment by complying with the advanced technological developments (Bixhorn, 2018). Youtube will facilitate the user's learning experience by providing undisrupted videos on smart devices. Another opportunity is to address the needs of those who can learn better through media or introspection (Pradeep, 2019). YouTube should be able to create a learning environment for encouraging critical thinking and inquiry of content.

Challenges

Measuring the authenticity and quality of the content of self-directed learning videos on YouTube is very challenging. Also, there is a lack of empirical work that reflects upon the way learners experience technical tools in the classroom and acquire knowledge (Conole, 2015). YouTube protects their partners by implementing Content ID against copyright issues (YouTube, 2020). This implementation ensures a healthy learning environment for self-directed learners by eliminating the risk of copyright violation. However, the quality of videos cannot be monitored. Another challenge is to search video content that is done by third-parties by manually generating transcripts and then synchronizing them with the videos, which is cost-intensive (Bixhorn, 2018). Automated speech-and-text recognition technology is an opportunity for YouTube in order to reduce costs. Youtube will also facilitate the content search for users by finding the keywords that are added to their library (Bixhorn, 2018).

On the other hand, assessment is a vital part of learning. The learner wants to know how successful they have become through their learning journey. There are many applications in smart devices for self-assessment (Pradeep, 2019). That might cause a switch of users from YouTube to the applications where they can assess their learning achievement. Kremer, Brannen & Glennerster (2013) in their study explored challenges associated with the adoption and implementation of educational technologies in developing countries that encompassed computer supplies, diffusion of technology, access, quality, accountability, and pedagogy issues.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approach

Based on the current literature, the research gap found within this research should focus on the identification of themes. It would further help to understand the scope for further research in the same research question. However, the approach has been criticized due to lacking clear guidelines for researchers using this method. The authors of this current study must follow a clear, transparent, and replicable methodology.

Participants

Fifteen hundred and twenty-five participants from different higher education institutes were invited to participate in focus group discussions for one year from 2018-2019. Participants belonged to computer science, artificial intelligence, and data science programs. The Focus group offered a more accurate and in-depth perspective of the reasons, the occurrence of the subject, transferring participants' attitudes, knowledge, and feeling toward a subject efficiently. Focus groups were able to explain in students' own words, which helped to understand their strategies of using online videos for self-directed learning. Focus groups offer more attention instead of one-to-one interviews based on the presumption that students would be more
comfortable within a group setting. The participants of the study were from different years of undergraduate and graduate study as they are more experienced than the other users who are not studying online. Also, the current students are considered more experienced in studying through YouTube. Some of the students in the graduate degree were already working in different fields, and they are experienced in self-directed learning more than undergraduates. Although all participants had collective experience in self-directed learning, using YouTube to learn new technologies relevant to their field of education. From total participants of fifty, only thirty-five volunteered to take part in a study composed of fourteen females and sixteen males sharing their thoughts in self-directed learning using online videos. The average age of the participant was 20 years old. One hundred and two sessions of focus group discussions were conducted, having 14 to 16 participants. It was ensured that undergraduate students and graduate students are in a different focus group as their learning ability, level of education, and knowledge are different. Also, the social and cultural background was considered within each focus group. Participants were asked during the focus group sessions for reasons and their experience of using YouTube as self-directed learning. Questions were asked in a semi-structured manner about online learning using YouTube as a self-directed learning channel. Answers were recorded, transcribed to verbal data, generation of initial codes, shortlisting themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and formalizing the analysis into a presentable manner using Nvivo software.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

Analysis has found that how high education learners use YouTube as a self-directed platform. While the limitations and usage of self-directed learning were derived from the thematic analysis are explained through four dimensions’ content availability, process, and video uses. The findings revealed the reason behind higher education students use YouTube as a medium to overcome the challenges faced during learning of a specific subject. Analysis of data has shown distinct themes guided by elements of cognitive theory and was highlighted for each of the dimensions through evidence of discussions.

CONTENT AVAILABILITY

Content plays a vital role in online learning. It was found during the analysis that higher education students use self-directed learning to understand better the subjects and content which they cannot learn during classroom sessions. YouTube remains an essential and popular choice for higher education students, whether foundation or advanced level concepts. Student C shared his story:

"I use YouTube as a self-directed learning medium as I did not get time during my regular study sessions…. And learn things which help me to understand in a better way with many good contents available."

Student V shared her story:

"I use YouTube for self-directed learning due to a lot of good content available from all over the world… that makes me understand the subject matter more easily."

There is massive content available online on YouTube with most of the content from 2-3 different authors which makes it easy to compare and learn the best concepts. Student A and B described, "Learning things more easily, and during our free time." Students were watching videos even before enrolling in any course during their learning period. Student M shared that "I use YouTube to learn professional concepts that are many times required to overcome new challenges during my job."

According to students, the most important thing that for online learning is valuable content. YouTube mainly has
updated and latest content available free. Students were able to keep them updated on the videos relevant to their subject of interest. Student R mentioned that "There is a lot of content available on YouTube and helps to stay updated with the latest content." Professional instructors also update their YouTube channels frequently which students can watch to learn the latest content. Student D shared her story:

"I like the depth and breadth of content available on YouTube, which has both mixes of professional and general content."

Most of the students always referred to YouTube as one of the best and free self-directed learning during their focus group discussions. It was asked during one of the sessions, "Why YouTube as self-directed learning?". Student E, H, I, J, and K, all of them said: "Due to availability of content." Student K shared his story:

"I use YouTube for learning professional skills which are required in the market and that also by sitting at home."

Students overall agreed with importance of self-directed learning using YouTube and were more concerned about availability of content. Student M mentioned that "Sometime I just want the content to be available so that I can improve my knowledge." However, student N shared her knowledge:

"Sometime, if the content is not labeled properly, it makes it hard to understand …..and integrate the knowledge properly…. Some of the content was outdated too."

Student L, W, and X shared that "You are your own boss, you learn your own way, your own time, and your own place… we do not need to read much text". All students agreed that it is more good watch and listen, rather than reading for long time. Students are now visual rather than just theoretical lectures. Online videos provide a great deal of ease and accessibility to students.

Generally, students tend to watch the videos which are free to watch and not paid without any restrictions. YouTube provides free content that no other sites can provide. Student O shared that

"My first website to use for self-directed learning was YouTube… I did and learnt… what I wanted."

**Process and Video use**

YouTube provides different diverse content that can be searched through many different platforms. However, students expressed that in order to find a relevant video, a proper process should be followed that allows the student to overcome the challenge of using YouTube as a self-directed learning medium. Often students do not find the right content, and the use of such video is not beneficial for them. Students first have to identify their learning goal, topic, selecting a medium for search (i.e., google, bingo), perform content analysis, compare knowledge, evaluate video use, self-reflect, and improve as shown in figure 3.

Overall, the process defines the way of using YouTube videos for self-directed learning. The process also helps students to improve their knowledge construct, integrate, and share with others.
Learning Goal

Digital learners tend to select their learning goals according to the latest trends and needs of their profession. Student F shared her story:

"I am always concerned about the latest trends in the market to stay updated with my job and career… YouTube in this case helps me a lot… as it is available and free provides the best approach for self-directed learning."

Students agreed that learning goal is an important and first step for self-directed learning. Few of the learners followed the learner goals as set by the latest trend on YouTube. Students R described that

"Follow the latest market trend. I set my learning goals often as my friends are learning something… which looks good to me….. for job-based perspective".

Student A shared that "I often select based on the currently enrolled course to enhance my knowledge."

Most students stated that they do not limit themselves to one learning goal. Some time there are two to three learning goals which include short-term and long-term goals. Instructors also influence student's choices as they mention new topics during the classes. Student Q shared her story:

"One of the instructors told us the latest trends in our course … emphasized and advised to learn through YouTube…. We did it and enjoyed self-directed learning."

All students agreed that videos on YouTube provide most of the content that matches their learning goal.

Topic Selection

Regardless of the learning goal, the topic selection relevant to the specific learning goal plays a vital role in moving ahead in the process of learning. Student P described that "For me, topic selection relevant to the learning goal is critical…. I sometimes feel lost without properly selected topics". Student A and K shared, "Topic selection is needed for all video searches for my course… it has to be matched with my course". Every video has different level of instruction and targeted for different audience. Every learner has to select the video according to his topic, which requires further in-depth search for the content of the video. Student R shared her experience:

"Like learning goal, when we see a video different than the required title, that wastes our time and makes us go back in a circle to work again."

Some students faced the challenge of topic selection and finding the most closely related topic to gain the required knowledge from the available videos for self-directed learning.
Selecting Search Medium

Student K mentioned that "Search medium is important, we cannot search anything without it… I prefer the fastest and easy search medium". Students were asked about the important of the search medium for searching the selected topic from the previous step as mentioned in figure 3. Student P and Q mentioned that "Yes, it is crucial as we need a good search medium. Preferably we all use Google for self-directed learning". Students usually rely on the available search engine at their campus or their home systems. The following quote describes student V experience "Like us, we are mostly focused on the topic selection, and we select the search medium which is already available and working. Usually... I choose Google on desktop or Bing as available". Generally, the selection of medium totally depends on the availability with the students whether desktop system or mobile. Regardless of the different types of systems, students voiced that they prefer search medium, which is readily available and easy to use. However, most of the students were concerned about finding the selected topic which can be done by using the YouTube search medium too. However, students E and F mentioned, "YouTube search medium populates many things that are hard to shortlist which one is the best, whereas Google gives an easy way to find the relevant content." Students did not want to have a paid search medium as most of them want free media which is readily available through the YouTube. Some students mentioned that few videos on their topic are available only through the paid medium and most of them tend to avoid such mediums. Students L described as "I want only free videos… as a student, I cannot afford paid".

Content Analysis and Comparison

Content should match with the selected title. Students N, A, and R mentioned that "Many times, the selected title and content mismatch, which causes trouble to search again." Often content analysis is not possible without searching and loading the content on the YouTube platform. However, all students agreed that YouTube most of the time provides the relevant content. Student M mentioned that "I use YouTube search engine for relevant content… and most of the content I found was relevant to what I needed… but many times the level of content is low… but any low quality content can work too… I just need the content on the required topic". Student W shared her story as:

"When I got the first opportunity to search the selected topic, I found many paid and free video content through several websites. many.. I selected YouTube available content."

Students mentioned that YouTube provides excellent content for self-direct learning as an online learning medium. The tutorials available on YouTube provide useful content in relevance to the selected topic. Students stated that content related to their choice of topic was available online on YouTube.

Student N shared that "Some sites provide seven days trial for premium content, but it is not affordable as a student. YouTube makes it free to provide free videos". Content compared to YouTube was excellent and free agreed by most students. Students A, C, and D mentioned that "We can learn in a better way … at our own pace .. using YouTube". Comparing the free content available online, YouTube is providing better free content than other websites. Most of the students pointed out that they do not want to pay for videos.

Self-Reflect and Improve

Students were asked about self-reflection after viewing videos related to their selected topics and the improvement of their knowledge. Students expressed satisfaction over learning new knowledge gained through the selected video during their self-directed learning endeavor. The majority of students agreed that they lack free time, and during limited time YouTube comes
as a tech-savvy for them. During the focus group, session students were asked to write small self-reflections and improvement of their knowledge using self-directed learning. Students repeatedly mentioned that they gain the required knowledge, which improves their understanding of a topic not only to the academic level but also to the professional level. Often students use YouTube as a self-directed learning platform for professional skills development too. While self-reflect and improvement cannot be measured in a short time, requiring more in-depth analysis.

Student M shared that "I gained a lot more than the required knowledge… the content helped me to improve professionally as well as academic". Student B, C, and R stated, "Using YouTube enabled us to increase our knowledge … and enable us to share with other fellow students". However, students agreed that using a proper learning process approach helps them to achieve better results. Self-reflection is vital for students to understand the usage of knowledge after learning and for future improvement.

Implications of the Study

The study involving higher education learners provided an in-depth analysis and helped to create a learning process that can be used by other students to overcome the self-directed learning challenges related to YouTube. It has contributed to understanding why students use YouTube for self-directed learning and improve their knowledge. Overall, students agreed that YouTube videos are a necessary medium for self-directed learning. Students learning through YouTube online might differ but commonly uses the same model, as shown in figure 3. The process also aligns with Knowles (1975) working definition of self-directed learning. Individual learners take initiatives without the help of others and choose their strategy according to their learning outcomes. The process of self-directed learning further aligns with the cognitive processing, and improvement of self-directed learning might help to improve the uses of online videos in a more effective manner. The current era of learners is highly dependent on online learning and aims to find the best way, which is free for learning (Gollardo, Marques, Bullen, and Stribos, 2015). Students often chose the online platform that matches their preferences, needs, and learning style. However, the majority of the students who learn through online videos do not share it back to other video learning sites or social media. Students aim only to learn and complete their required tasks. The findings of the study show that students need the availability of required videos with excellent content to meet the need of long term focus, attention, and learning goals. Online video sharing websites, primarily YouTube, should focus on opportunities to promote meaningful content that engages learners and maximize their potential for self-directed learning.

Although online video content is not available on YouTube in a MOOC style and has many quality flaws for content, quality, a visual display that needs to filled by the developers of the content rather than someone else reinventing the wheel. Many authors on YouTube create the same content in a different way, which teaches the same thing, which creates confusion among the students to view the right video. Many of the authors lack instructional design approaches and use the wrong visual appeal of the content that does not match with the title or inside the content of the video. Lack of useful approaches by the author of such videos cause low motivation and focus among the students as self-directed learning.

Limitation of the Study

The present study is limited to the United Arab Emirates higher education learners that are enrolled in different institutions with few of them working in professional jobs. Student's actual comments were presented in this paper. It was ensured that similar data is available in most closely related themes and subthemes. Interrelation among the themes was checked to ensure meanings and codes are aligned accurately. However, no formal method was applied to claim the level of accuracy. It can
potentially bound to the locality of the research and fluency of the interpreters, which can be different according to the available learning contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study are based on YouTube self-directed learning, which depicts the importance of YouTube as a self-directed learning platform. The analysis from this video can help the author of videos to improve their content according to the user learning goals as the current era of online learning is increasing rapidly. Educational instructors should also empower their students through YouTube as an online learning medium. The findings of the study can be used to develop a customized learning approach for higher education learners by providing high-quality content according to the latest trends and approaches. The purpose of online videos should not only focus on availability and should create an impact on user engagement, learning, experience, and motivation through high-quality content. The findings are essential to the content developers, researchers, video authors, instructional designers, and new learners to use the learning process for properly meeting their learning objectives. The drawbacks mentioned in the study should be taken in a positive note for the online video sites for comparison and providing content that can define the user learning path for the future and enable the learning-focused approach.

REFERENCES

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