Readiness For Self-Directed Learning Among Dental Undergraduates of University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

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Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is essential for dental professionals to maintain evidence-based dentistry and lifelong learning. However, the Sri Lankan teacher directed school education often hinders the development of these skills, making the transition to university education challenging. This study investigated the Self-Directed Learning Readiness (SDLR) among dental undergraduates and its associated factors.A cross-sectional survey was conducted at the Faculty of Dental Sciences University of Peradeniya targeting the entire undergraduate student population currently registered at the faculty. An online questionnaire based on Williamson 60-item rating scale of Self-Rating Scale of Self-Directed Learning (SRSSDL) was used. However, response rates varied across batches, and potential response bias inherent to the online survey methodology should be acknowledged as a limitation.The response rate was 73.87% with 523 responses. The overall mean SDL score was 215.3 which is a moderate level according to the SRSSDL(141-220). Male students had a higher mean score (216.08) compared to female students (214.71) which was not statistically significant (p=0.593). There was a notable fluctuation in SDLR scores across batches with Batch 23 having the highest of 223.86 with a statistically significant difference compared to other batches (p=0.046). Domain-wise analysis revealed significant differences in learning strategies (p=0.034) and learning activities (p< 0.001), while awareness, evaluation, and interpersonal skills showed no significant variation across batches.Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis showed no significant association between SDLR scores and academic performance (GPA) (r = 0.059, p = 0.219), suggesting that traditional assessment methods may not adequately capture self-directed learning competencies.Notably, junior clinical batches recorded lower SDLR scores. While this may possibly be related to increased clinical workload and structured schedules limiting opportunities for self-directed engagement, this association was not directly investigated and warrants further exploration. In conclusion, this study reveals that dental undergraduates at the University of Peradeniya possess a moderate level of readiness for SDL, while non-clinical batches demonstrate higher readiness likely due to the adoption of interactive learning strategies. A significant readiness reduction occurred during the transition to clinical training.

Keywords: self-directed learning, dental undergraduate