

## SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING DIMENSIONS AND IN-SERVICE GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS IN ALBANIA

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### Abstract

The teacher's professional development is an important part of professional life. In Albania, during continuing education in-service teachers use various forms of education such as through internal school development, training by training agencies accredited by MASR, attending short and long-term courses, counseling, and professional networks. Our study aims to observe and analyze the implementation of self-directed learning as an individual and professional form of professional development of teachers. This form of education was observed in a group of 60 teachers of geography and history-geography profile, randomly sampled with snowball sampling technique. Teachers are employed in the pre-university system and their educational institutions are in both urban and rural areas. They have different experiences concerning years in education.

This study examined the impacts of self-directed learning in three main dimensions: on technology use, on pedagogical issues, and on curricular geography content. The study shows a slightly positive correlation between teaching experience and time spent on self-directed learning. The results indicated that teachers are focused "sometimes" and "often" in all three dimensions of self-directed learning. Statistical processing indicated a moderate relationship between teachers who trained themselves for curriculum content and didactic issues and vice versa.

The observation instrument was a questionnaire designed with open and closed questions. In their structuring, we used the Likert scale (5 levels) and the data collected by it were processed in the SPSS program. Some statistical analyses are undertaken through the results in frequency, cross-tabulation, and correlation. Other processing was performed with NLP, Sentiment Analysis to help study to address the main issues of three self-directed learning dimensions. The impact of the study is valid for teachers of geography and history-geography profile, learning inspectors and specialists, headteachers other interested actors in the field of education.

*Keywords:* in service geography teachers, dimension, professional development, curricular geography content, technology use, pedagogical issues.

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### 1. Introduction

This study focused on teachers' *self-directed learning*; a concept derived from adult learning theories that accommodates for the idea that teachers formulate their own learning needs and consequently direct their learning. In terms of *self-directed learning*, *self-study*, *self-training*, and the core element element is "self". These terms are important in lifelong learning. Self-directed learning in the teaching profession means educating yourself individually and professionally based on your requirements and your professional needs. Brookfield (2009) in his book "*International handbook of education for the changing world of work*" states that "Self-directed learning is learning in which the conceptualization, design, conduct and evaluation of a learning project are directed by the learner". According to Francine d'Ortun (2011) definition of self-training from the workplace perspective is: "*A model of training in which the learner takes the initiative and autonomously chooses to learn goals and methods and acquires knowledge using his resources and those of his/her community.*". This form of experiential education with self-directed learning is later transmitted to students in school

enabling self-education. In this way, teachers become implementers of learning to learn competence, one of the 7 key competencies that students must possess, according to the competence-based curriculum, which is being implemented in pre-university education in Albania since 2016 (MAS, IZHA, 2016). For this skill Navarro, Pacheco-Velazquez, Arana-Solares, and Mendoza, (2020) would say: “This skill is essential to cope with the complexity of interactions that people frequently face. Therefore, many companies prefer to have employees who manage their time and achieve results independently (without the direction of supervisors, trainers, or educators).

Day by day it is more important that people develop the ability to acquire new skills, new knowledge and self-management.”

While Kapur (2019), highlights that “When the individuals are participating in self-directed learning, it is vital for them to develop interest and willingness. When they will possess interest and enthusiasm, they will have access to support and guidance, they would be able to improve their performance and carry out various tasks and activities in a well-organized manner.

Geng, K.M.Y, and Niu. (2019) have cited Long (1994) as “Self-directed learning (SDL) refers to the psychological processes of learners that purposively direct themselves to gain knowledge and understand how to solve problems“

Self-directed learning is a form of personal and professional development where the orientation is realized by the teacher themselves.

Other forms of professional development of teachers organized by *professional organizations* not by teachers themselves, in Albania are mentioned: Internal professional development which is carried out at the level of school through the council of teachers and curricular teams; Training generally organized by training agencies accredited by MASR, professional networks which function as professional organizations of teachers with meetings on average once a month; counseling developed by schools and educational institutions at the central and regional level, as well as short-term and long-term courses (MASR 2017).

## 2. Metodology

In this study teachers from different schools in Albania were asked about their experience in self-directed learning. The study aims to examine the use of self-directed learning in terms of their professional development focusing on three main dimensions: issues of technology use; didactic issues and geography curricular content. The sampling included in the study are in-service teachers and currently have in their teaching schedule the subject of geography. They are teachers of the profile history-geography-social subjects. The study focuses on examining the relationship between time spent on self-directed learning and work experience in teaching geography. It also highlights how teachers view this form of education as a need, necessity, or passion. It tries to identify some forms of application by teachers in the current situation

The study reveals the situation and draws conclusions that are valid for possible recommendations, bringing impact on teachers of this profile, educational specialists, educational leaders of different levels, policymakers, and other actors who operate in the field of education.

The study is based on a research in the written literature on self-directed learning and application based on an online observation instrument. The questionnaire contains open and closed questions. It is structured in general professional questions and specific questions related to the study topic. The collected data were processed according to the SPSS program, making it possible to perform statistical analysis through the results in frequency, cross-tabulation, and Pearson correlation. The sampling time was in March 2021. NLP, Sentiment Analysis helped study to address the main contextual issues of three self-directed learning dimensions

The number of participants in the study, at the national level, was 60 teachers employed in the pre-university system near schools that were in both rural and urban areas. So, they are currently employed, teachers. In their selection was used snowball sampling system, thus gaining a sample with randomly selected teachers. Professional ethics was respected in each phase during the realization of each step in the study.

### 3. Results

#### *General findings*

In this study participated 60 teachers that are working in the pre-university education system. They belong to the profile: history, geography, and social sciences, which means that teachers own more than 50% of the professional norm per week in geography subject. The rest of the norm is conducted by lessons from history and/or social sciences subjects. The weekly teaching norm of the teacher is 20 teaching hours per week.

85% of teachers are female and 15% are male. Teachers have different professional categories of grading: 15% of them are unclassified which means they have less than 5 years of work experience in education; up to 10 years of work in education, 20% of them are classified as “qualified teachers” with 5 to 10 years work experiences in education, 38.3% of them are classified as “specialist teachers” with 10 years to 20 years work experiences in education and 26.7% are classified as high skilled teachers with over 20 years of work experiences in education. So, 65% of the sample are teachers with over 10 years of work in education and constitute a good quality sample in terms of professional experience.

63.3% of the respondents are employed in schools in urban areas and the rest in schools located in rural areas.

#### *Specific findings*

Teachers were initially asked to define self-directed learning concepts. This question is open and the answers are varied. Some of them are mentioned below:

*"Professional growth from self-education"-respondent 11*

*"Self-directed learning is the professional growth of the teacher through self-study methods"-respondent 15*

*"To be developed professionally through individual training; self-directed learning means to "live", every day with the latest information and the needs for practicing of the innovations in education"-respondent 16.*

*"The opportunity of every teacher to find, learn new information, professional innovations to be felt fulfilled in his professional field"- respondent 19*

*"An individual effort to grow professionally"-respondent 20*

*"The activity of every teacher to educate himself and learning by profession. It is very necessary for the passion of the subject" - respondent 31*

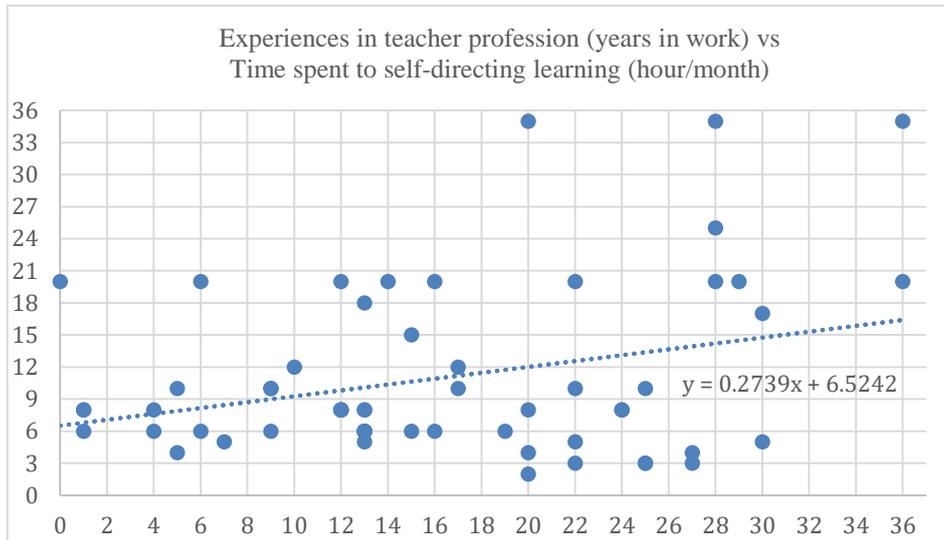
*"Individual education of the teacher in his profession"-respondent 49*

*"Acquiring new professional skills through reading and being informed"-respondent 52.*

In a comprehensive analysis of the question, a good definition of the concept and the perception of this manner of education as part of education throughout the life of individuals in the profession is evidenced. Self-directed learning serves teachers in their professional development.

Asked about the time they spent on self-directed learning, teachers give different answers. These answers have been observed in correlation with years of work experience in education. There is a positive correlation, although not very strong, between the hours per month spent for self-directed learning and the years of work experience. With the increase of years of work

in education, the time spent on self-directed learning easily increases. Specifically in this sample, with each increase in years of work with one unit, i.e., with one year, there is an increase in commitment to self-directed learning by approximately 0.3 hours per month (Figure 1). The results show that there are cases when teachers of the high skilled grading category, i.e., over 20 years of work in education, spend up to 35-36 hours per month for self-directed learning.



**Figure 1.** Experiences in teacher profession (years in work) vs Time spent to self-directing learning (hour/month)

The focus of the study was to determine the diversity of the main dimensions in self-directed learning, used by teachers to support their profession. When asked how often oriented they were in self-directed learning on the use of hardware and software technology, 50% of them replied “often” and 33.3% of them replied “sometimes” making up the majority in the answers given. The fact of experiencing the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred last year, has led to the need for professional development in dimension. A good part of teaching is developed based on distance teaching and learning model. Aiming to assess the situation and further needs for professional orientation was studied the relations on hardware and software technology, and the professional experience of grading (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Crosstab: Self-directed learning on technology issues and teacher’s grading

			Teacher’s grading				Total
			high skilled teacher	specialist teacher	qualified teacher	unclassified teacher	
Self-directed learning on technology issues	rarely	Count	0	3	2	1	6
		% of Total	0.0%	5.0%	3.3%	1.7%	10.0%
	sometimes	Count	2	9	3	6	20
		% of Total	3.3%	<b>15.0%</b>	5.0%	10.0%	33.3%
	often	Count	10	11	7	2	30
		% of Total	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	11.7%	3.3%	50.0%
	very often	Count	3	0	1	0	4
		% of Total	5.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	6.7%
	Total	Count	15	23	13	9	60
		% of Total	25.0%	38.3%	21.7%	15.0%	100.0%

From table 1, it is seen that the frequent needs and uses for self-directed learning are encountered by specialist and highly skilled teachers, mainly in 16.7% and 33.3% of them.

To deepen in these issues it is estimated the respondent's answers to the question about the thematic frequented recently and their main keywords. It is used natural language processing by Sentiment Analysis. From the image content (figure 2) and teachers' answers it is seen that respondents are oriented especially in self-directed learning on platforms, online teaching, in using ICT, google classrooms, academia.al which is a national platform dedicated to online learning for pre university education during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.



**Figure 2.** The main issues on self-directed learning on technology issues

The second interest in the study is self-directed learning in terms of didactic methodologies that teachers observe, know, and improve through it. The results showed that 41.7% of teachers were oriented "often" in didactic methodological self-directed learning, followed by 33.3% of them as "sometimes" and 15% as "very often". Interest in training on didactic issues remains high.

It was further passed on to an analysis of the possible relation between professional orientations in didactic dimension depending on professional experience, realized through self-directed learning. (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Crosstab: Self-directed learning on didactic issues and teacher's grading

			Teacher's grading				Total
			high skilled teacher	specialist teacher	qualified teacher	unclassified teacher	
Self-directed learning on didactic issues	rarely	Count	0	3	2	1	6
		% of Total	0.0%	5.0%	3.3%	1.7%	10.0%
	sometimes	Count	4	8	3	6	21
		% of Total	6.7%	<b>13.3%</b>	5.0%	10.0%	35.0%
	often	Count	8	<b>8</b>	7	1	24
		% of Total	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	1.7%	40.0%
	very often	Count	3	4	1	1	9
		% of Total	5.0%	6.7%	1.7%	1.7%	15.0%
	Total	Count	15	23	13	9	60
		% of Total	25.0%	38.3%	21.7%	15.0%	100.0%

Table 2 expressed that exactly the most frequent self-directed learning on didactic dimensions belong to the teachers over than 5 years of work in education, including high skilled and specialist teachers.





**Figure 4.** The main issues on self-directed learning on geography curricula content issues

Table 4 indicates that correlations are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . The correlations between issues on self-directed learning are positive. They appear as moderate relationship (Salkind 2000) especially in cases when teachers train themselves for geography curricula content issues and with didactic issues and further in technological issues. A weak relationship appears between self-directed learning in didactic issues and technology issues. In the sense of professional development, this sampling showed that teachers are doing good self-study and continuously.

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlations Among issues on self-directed learning

		technology _issues	didactic issues	Curricula content issues
technology issues	Pearson Correlation	1	.376**	.432**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.001
	N	60	60	60
didactic issues	Pearson Correlation	.376**	1	.598**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.000
	N	60	60	60
curricula content issues	Pearson Correlation	.432**	.598**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	
	N	60	60	60

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When asked *what are some of the forms they use for self-directed learning*, teachers answered: reading geographical books, ASCAP-oriented subject guidelines and publication, postgraduate readings and studies, conference publications and MOOC, literature focusing on competency-based learning, geographical materials from the internet, such as the study of electronic atlases and reading additional materials in the field of geography, TV shows with geographical curiosities, watching various videos and discussing with colleagues, professional social networks, etc.

To the question of *whether the school recommends self-directed learning as part of professional development in lifelong education* the teachers have all been answered and their answers are varied ranging from sufficient to highly recommended. Some of the answers were:

*"The geography subject team operates regularly in the school and has a special and mandatory plan for the school internal qualification", in which it is understood that the concept of self-directed learning still needs clarification within the sampled group. In a positive context it is considered the response of respondent 53 which states:*

*"The teacher must educate itself. The school directs, guides, cooperates, organizes, orients, enables connections, announces meetings, creates opportunities for self-directed learning, and stimulates it".*

We think that the school should play its role as a regulator, motivator, and facilitator in terms of self-directed learning by not leaving it to chance and unexpected situations. Boyer, N. R., and Usinger, P. state (2015) "In self-directed learning, the responsibility to learn shifts from an external source (teacher, etc.) to the individual. Control and active involvement of the learner in the learning process are crucial in this process". Better trained teachers mean better schools.

The last question was *whether self-training is a need, a necessity or a passion for them?* Passion and necessity have been part of most of the answers, by considering both of them. Meanwhile respondent 18 emphasizes, *"The situation in which we are living, self-directed learning is a necessity but when it is associated with passion it makes the profession more pleasant"* as well as the answer of the respondent 27 *"Passion for profession leads to self-directed learning"*.

## **Conclusion**

Self-directed learning is the external management of the learning process. In this study it is observed as part of the practice of educating adults, in-service teachers of the profile history-geography and social sciences subjects who in their curricula teaching norm develop the subject of geography. In the study, was paid attention to the motivational and cognitive dimensions of this form of education, but the frequency and main dimension in self-directed learning were evaluated. Also, the relation between these dimensions was observed. Cognitive, motivational, self-management, reflection, critical thinking, information management competencies are another challenge in the continuation of studies in the process of learning in adults through self-directed learning, but they are not part of this study.

Through the study, it is possible to understand the needs for self-directed learning, the current ways of its realization and it is understood how much time is devoted to this form of professional development, depending on work experience, where teachers practice their professional help in self-directed learning. Self-directed learning enriches teachers to the competence learn to learn by gaining knowledge, attitudes, values for their professional and personal growth. They become promoters of the transmission of this ability to students, an integral part of the 7 key competencies that students should be trained in pre-university education since 2016.

The study is based on a qualitative sampling where 63.3% of teachers have more than 10 years of work in education, providing significant feedback for the study. They state that they are oriented towards self-training in all three dimensions by spending different amounts of hours per month. There is a slightly positive relationship between the hours spent on self-directed learning and years of work experience in this profession. For each additional year of work, within the sampling group, the number of hours for self-directed learning increased by 0.3 hours per month.

Mostly specialist teachers and those skilled and qualified teachers "often" and "sometimes" conducted self-directed learning on technology issues and knowledge and methodical pedagogical uses. High-skilled and specialist teachers conduct "very often" and "often" self-directed learning on geographical curricular content. Teachers are very focused on their professional development as an important part of their continuing education. The study showed that teachers did self-directed learning in geography curricular content in moderate relationship with didactic issues and technology issues.

Self-directed learning, as a form of individual education, is encouraged, motivated by the teacher itself. The school also plays a role in the teacher training itself. Seeing the needs of teachers, schools, become a facilitator of this process by providing, accessing, orienting teachers according to their needs. In the study it was observed that the teachers themselves were educated more on issues of learning on platforms, online teaching, in using ICT software and hardware, google classrooms, etc. While in the didactic dimension they preferred issues on online teaching and learning techniques, assessment method, tests ethics issues, issues on competence-based learning and project-based learning, didactic uses of the globe, maps, subject schemes, posters, etc. In the dimension of curricular content, the interest of geography subjects remained mainly in updating of curricula content, as well as with the distribution of geographical phenomena on a global or regional scale. Dominated by issues of population, climate, tourism, vegetation, environment, self-training on volcanoes, tectonic plates, earthquakes, erosion, and meteorological issues.

These aspects generated within the dimensions of the study as part of self-directed learning become the core of any other form of teacher education affecting further professional development. Automatically, their need and interest is the main theme which can be addressed during the meetings of professional networks, during meetings in school as part of internal professional development, as part of training by training agencies, etc.

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