Journal of Education and e-Learning Research
Vol. 11, No. 3, 464-472, 2024
ISSN(E) 2410-9991 / ISSN(P) 2518-0169
DOI: 10.20448/jeelr.v11i3.5828

Psychosocial barriers to promoting self-directed and autonomous learning: The perception of students and lecturers in Malaysia

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Abstract

It can be difficult to align with the present theoretical change in education from teacher-centered to student-centered learning especially in high-power distance cultures like Malaysia that are communal. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding the psychosocial barriers to promoting self-directed and autonomous learning in the Malaysian context. The qualitative research method was chosen based on the research questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand people's beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and behaviors. This study used purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen students and four lecturers at a Malaysian public university. The study found two types of challenges: personal (within the student) and environmental (surrounding the student). Personal obstacles include ideas about the value of education such as an emphasis on grades and diplomas as well as attitudes towards life, such as a propensity for hedonism and a need for spoon-feeding. Environmental barriers include a lack of encouragement for critical thinking, the development of student dependency, issues with university regulations, family and lecturers' attitudes and teaching methods. These challenges were explained using Hofstede's, self-determination and ARCS theories. The study highlights how important it is for teachers to modify their pedagogical approaches and attitudes in order to encourage student-centered learning as well as how important it is for students to get more assistance and support.

Keywords: Autonomous learning, Barriers, Lecturers, Malaysia, Psychosocial, Self-directed learning, Students.

Citation | Esmaeil, A. A. A. H., Dzulkifli, D. N. B. A. K. @, Maakip, I., Halik, M., & Marshall, S. (2024). Psychosocial barriers to promoting self-directed and autonomous learning: The perception of students and lecturers in Malaysia. *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research, 11*(3), 464–472. 10.20448/jeelr.v11i3.5828
History:
Received: 3 May 2023
Revised: 14 February 2024
Accepted: 6 March 2024
Published: 19 July 2024

Publisher: Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.
Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia has granted approval for this study (Ref. No. UMS/FPSK6.9/100-6/1/95).
Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.
Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature

This paper explores new psycho-social barriers to student-centered learning in Malaysia revealing how cultural dynamics and educational attitudes impact both students and lecturers. It uniquely employs qualitative methods to integrate both student and lecturer perspectives uncovering the interplay between personal attitudes, societal norms and educational practices that hinder the adoption of self-directed learning.

1. Introduction

Self-directed learning and learner autonomy have become a focus of interest in the 21st century as part of the current shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (Morris, 2019). Self-directed learning is an essential tool in today's competitive world because it enables individuals to continue their education under challenging conditions which protects them from long-term unemployment. It is also an essential skill that enables individuals to adjust to complex and fluid contextual changes. It aids students in achieving self-actualization and long-term professional success.

Although a lot of study has been done on these concepts, there is a lack of studies on the obstacles to integrating learner autonomy and self-directed learning particularly in Malaysia. The current study aims to investigate students' and lecturers' perceptions regarding the psycho-social challenges of promoting self-directed learning and learner autonomy in Malaysian higher education.

2. Literature Review

The literature review for this study will be divided into three sections: The first section will discuss self-directed learning and learner autonomy. The second section will focus on introducing Hofstede's dimensions and the culture in Malaysia while also discussing some characteristics of generation Z. Finally, the last section will discuss self-determination and ARCS theories.

2.1. Self-Directed Learning and Learner Autonomy

Modern teachers generally believe that learner autonomy and self-directed learning are essential concepts. One of the most popular and widely accepted definitions of self-directed learning is that it refers to an individual who assumes ownership and initiative in their education by determining their learning needs, recognizing their learning gaps, selecting and putting into practice the appropriate learning strategies and being able to assess their progress (Knowles, 1975). However, this concept faced criticism for its significant emphasis on the individual and a lack of appreciation for the role of lecturers and the context.

Long (1989) suggested three dimensions for self-directed learning: sociological, pedagogical and psychological. The sociological dimension refers to the physical isolation of the learner such as in web-based learning. The pedagogical dimension refers to the amount of freedom given to the learner to decide and determine their learning goals and methods. The psychological dimension refers to the individual's willingness to take responsibility for their learning. When the psychological dimension is equal to or greater than the pedagogical dimension, then only we would say that the learning process is self-directed.

Garrison (1997) identifies three main components of self-directed learning: self-management, self-monitoring and motivation. He also argues that the essence of self-directed learning is to develop authentic motivation among students. Another commonly used model proposed by Brockett and Hiemstra (2012) defines self-directed learning as the interaction between three elements: the person (personal characteristics such as self-concept, self-efficacy, and motivation), the process (teaching and learning transactions such as organizing and goal setting) and the context (encompassing the environment, sociopolitical climate, culture and economic status). Loeng (2020) provides further details on the notion of self-directed learning's history and other related concerns.

On the other hand, learner autonomy refers to the learner's capability to take charge and responsibility for their learning (Benson, 2011). According to Littlewood (cited by Hu and Zhang (2017)), learner autonomy consists of two essential elements: the learner's capacity and desire to make decisions on their own and the learner's ability and willingness to make choices independently. According to Benson (2011) the most important difference between self-directed learning and learner autonomy is that autonomy is a quality of the learner while self-directed learning is a mode of learning. He also notes that in North American education, self-directed learning is a broad capability while autonomy is a personal quality to be a self-directed learner. Although the words self-directed learning and learner autonomy are similar, they shall be referred to as "student-centered learning" for the purposes of this study.

2.2. Constraints of Student-Centered Learning

Various obstacles might prevent student-centered learning such as financial or time limits, psychological issues such as low motivation or self-assurance and institutional issues like rules and procedures that restrict students (Aslanian & Cross, 1983). Additional elements that may have a detrimental effect on student-centered learning include students' lack of experience, their focus on passing tests, their lack of incentives, their reliance on teachers and the lack of time and educational regulations (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Additionally, various personal and contextual factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, self-reflection, self-concept of academics, learning attitude, interest in learning, openness to learning, emotional intelligence, age, intelligence quotient, self-esteem, wisdom, emotional stability, internal locus of control, sense of coherence, life satisfaction, commitment, confidence, and cultural values can influence student-centred learning. Furthermore, research has indicated that students' autonomy might be impeded by dominant teachers who reject their opinions. Additionally, student-centered learning can be affected by sociocultural characteristics including shyness, respect for elders and the importance of maintaining an appearance. Finally, some studies have reported that the Malaysian and Pakistani contexts have additional barriers such as less time, curriculum overload and difficulty for teachers to change from being knowledge experts to facilitators (Boyer, Edmondson, Artis, & Fleming, 2013; Cazan &

Schiopca, 2014; Saeid & Eslaminejad, 2017; Siddiqui, Nerali, & Telang, 2021; Toit-Brits & Van Zyl, 2017; Wong, Tang, & Cheng, 2021; Zhoc, Chung, & King, 2018).

Assessing earlier research revealed two gaps. First, most of the research was conducted using quantitative methods. Second, there is a lack of numerous resources that specifically look at the obstacles to student-centered learning in Malaysia (Nasri & Mansor, 2016). Research also done in different geographical contexts concentrated on the sociocultural element rather than offering a description of the psycho-social viewpoint (Yasmin, Naseem, & Masso, 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). This study identifies potential psychological and social barriers while providing a potential explanation of how they interact with each other.

2.3. Power Distance, Individualistic-Collectivistic, Certainty Avoidance, Long-Short- Term Orientation, Malaysia and Gen Z

Hofstede has suggested six cultural dimensions that affect every society. The first dimension, power distance, reflects the amount of inequality that is expected from the less powerful members of society. People tend to be in more equal relationships in cultures with a low power gap whereas people in cultures with a high power distance are expected to submit to those in positions of authority. This may have an impact on education as well as learning in low power distance cultures is often more teacher-centered while learning in high power distance cultures is more student-centered.

Uncertainty avoidance represents a culture's approach to dealing with uncertainty and unfamiliar circumstances. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to approve of unconventional behaviour and ideas whereas high uncertainty avoidance cultures are more likely to have strict rules and moral behaviour.

The third dimension, individualism versus collectivism reflects the degree of integration among groups. Individualistic societies value individual autonomy and self-expression while collectivistic societies prioritize group harmony and loyalty.

The fourth dimension, long-term orientation reflects a culture's tendency to maintain a link with the past while dealing with new challenges. Cultures with a short-term orientation tend to view tradition as sacred while cultures with a long-term orientation tend to adapt to new challenges. Students in short-term orientation cultures are more likely to attribute success to chance whereas students in long-term orientation cultures are more likely to attribute success to work. These differences in approach have ramifications for how students credit their achievements as well. Hofstede proposes two other dimensions as well.

It's crucial to maintain that Eastern cultures including those in Malaysia usually place more value on harmony, cooperation and interdependence than they do on the autonomy and individuality that are typically associated with Western cultures (Ahmad & Majid, 2010a; Faizah, 2008). Additionally, Eastern cultures tend to place a greater emphasis on spiritual well-being than materialism (Ahmad & Majid, 2010b; Faizah, 2008). These cultural characteristics may make it difficult to adopt self-directed learning since the autonomy and self-direction needed for this kind of learning conflict with the conventional emphasis on hierarchy and interdependence (Chou, Chiu, Lai, Tsai, & Tzeng, 2012; Lam & Lam, 2009; Liu, 2019). Moreover, these obstacles could also be influenced by the Confucian philosophy which is widely accepted in Eastern culture (Chou et al., 2012; Lam & Lam, 2009; Liu, 2019).

Additionally, the culture of the "Gen Z" generation which includes individuals born between 1995 and 2012, is also worth considering (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). According to research, this generation is distinguished by its appreciation of technology but also by its lack of social skills, increased risk of isolation and short attention span. These characteristics may also pose barriers to the implementation of self-directed learning as they may affect the student's ability to engage in and benefit from this type of learning.

2.4. Self-Determination Theory and ARCS

Self-determination argues that we have to fulfil three psychological needs to function optimally which are: the need for autonomy, relatedness (belongingness) and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2012). These needs can be developed or undermined (thwarted) by the environment. It is suggested that you support individual autonomy by providing a reward that encourages them to develop their internal locus (they have control over the events that are happening to them). Furthermore, intrinsic motivation will be dissatisfied if the reward makes them develop their external locus (anything that happens to them is beyond their control).

Furthermore, they have developed another theory that explains how we internalize external motivation. They distinguish between three types of internalization. The first is introduction which occurs when people accept the values of their environment due to a need to feel good about them and to avoid feeling guilty. When someone adopts the norms or values of their surroundings as their own, they participate in the second kind of internalization known as identification. Integration is the third kind of internalization that happens when people combine their own values with those of their environment.

The theory differentiates between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation encompasses intrinsic motivation and identifies or integrates extrinsic motivation whereas controlled motivation comprises external control and intrinsic regulation" (Deci & Ryan, 2012). On the other hand, ARCS are more concerned with deviling the motivational appeal of instructional material (Keller, 1987). ARCS defines four major conditions that have to be met for people to stay motivated. The first one is attention which is a prerequisite for any educational process. Gaining and maintaining students' attention is the primary goal of concentration.

The response to the question "Why do I have to learn this?" is the second need which is relevance. Relevance is also about connecting what students learn with their lives and their future. According to this perspective, relevance may result not only from the topic itself but also from the method by which the information is delivered.

The third quality is confidence which is influenced by several things including the conviction that our work and not the nature of the task together determine whether we succeed or fail (whether it is hard or easy). Moreover, the student who has confidence will have more courage to commit mistakes. The last component is satisfaction which incorporates research and practice and is concerned with helping the student feel good about their accomplishments.

3. Methodology

The study aims to provide a profound understanding of the psychosocial barriers to moving towards student-centered learning from the perspective of both students and lecturers. Three questions were developed:

1. How do students and lecturers perceive the barriers within the student?
2. How do students and lecturers perceive the barriers regarding student social environments?
3. How do these barriers interact with each other?

The qualitative research method was chosen based on the research questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand people's beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.

The following sections will be divided into four subsections: the participant profile, the sampling strategy, the data collection procedure and the approach to data analysis.

3.1. Participant Profile

There were eleven students from social science, one from computer and informatics and one from the faculty of engineering. On the other hand, there are three lecturers from social science as well as one lecturer from the liberal arts. Two methods of interviewing were conducted: the individual interview and the focus group interview. Each focus group consisted of three individuals.

Among the seventeen interviewed that were included in the study, only two were males and the rest were females (see Table 1).

3.2. Sampling Strategy

The current study used convenience and purposive sampling which means that our research participants were available and capable of answering the research questions. There were three main criteria for choosing our research participants among the students (see Table 1). First of all, they have at least a year of study experience in social science and are more qualified to respond to research questions. . The second benefit is that they can communicate in English because the interviewer is an international student who does not speak the participants' mother tongue. Thirdly, interviews with them were possible because the study was self-funded and teachers were chosen depending on their availability. We are aware of our sampling biases. Since convenient sampling may not be a good representative of the population.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The study used semi-structured interviews. The researcher may then use this to better understand the subjects under examination while also providing the research participant with a quick and inexpensive means of expressing their opinions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The questions were created using the literature that was accessible and by adhering to the recommendations given by guidance. The designed questions were as follows: 1. What are the challenges that exist within student life that might demotivate them to adopt student-centered learning? 2. What are the social and environmental issues that might inhibit the transition from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning? One of the challenges faced was the unfamiliarity of student-centered learning among students and lecturers. They received a brief introduction to the concept's main premises in order to solve this problem. Please refer to Appendix A for more information.

3.4. Data Analysis

The current study adopts the Objectivist Grounded Theory (OGT) presented by Corbin and Strauss (2014) which aims to explain the "causes, conditions, contexts, contingencies, consequences and covariance" of the social process. The theory uses critical realism as its ontological belief. It emphasizes the idea of discovery which implies the existence of an independent reality outside the mind. Furthermore, the theory argues against the possibility of fully grasping external reality (Coşkun, 2020). The aim of this research is to identify the psycho-social obstacles that stand in the way of advancing student-centered learning which suggests that these obstacles are real and objective. OGT was founded to satisfy the research objective. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Atlas. 9 to ease the analysis process. The code was developed using the hybrid approach (inductive and deductive) suggested by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). This approach allows the researcher to construct code deductively (implementing the theoretical background) while the inductive approach allows the researcher to be open and flexible in developing new codes. The researchers followed the following procedure: they first familiarized themselves with the data. One researcher applied line-by-line coding until they reached a point where there were no more codes to be added. They conducted constant comparisons and merged the constructed codes to develop categories. Two researchers then discussed the emerging categories and grouped them into themes and sub-themes which allowed the theory to be developed.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Name	Faculty	Gender
Lecturer 1	Faculty of computing and informatics	Female
Lecturer 2	Education and psychology	Female
Lecturer 3	Liberal sciences	Male
Lecturer 4	Education and psychology	Female
Students 1	Education and psychology	Female
Students 2	Education and psychology	Female
Students 3	Education and psychology	Male
Students 4	Faculty of engineering	Male
Students 5	Education and psychology	Female
Students 6	Education and psychology	Female
Students 7	Education and psychology	Female
Focus group 1 (Consists of 3)	All from education and psychology	All were female.
Focus group 2 (Consists of 3)	All from education and psychology	All were female.

Table 2. Summary of themes and sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-theme	Key ideas
Personal barriers	Approach towards life and society	Hedonism
		Immaturity
		Staying in the comfort zone (Procrastination)
		Fear of being different
		Highly concerned with pleasing the other
		Nothing can be changed (Learning helplessness).
	Educational purpose	Education is only for grade and certificate.
		Entering university only to fulfil their family's wishes.
		Volunteering is just for the merit point.
Environmental barriers	Lack of freedom for developing critical thinking	Critical thinking inside the box.
		Prefer to follow without questioning much.
	Fostering student dependency	The teacher is one who gives the student everything.
		The school provides a tailored answer for the student.
		Not encouraged to explore by themselves.
	The role of the university system and regulation	Long lecturers' period
		Too many assignment
	The role of the family	Economic condition
		Flexibility to choose the course
		Asian comparison cultures
	Lecturer's attitude	Feeling superior
		Micro-managing student
		Double standard
		Unreliable (Keep gossiping about students)
		Favourite student
	Teaching method	Wasting the lecturer's time
		Not emphasizing the importance of the topic

4. The Findings

The findings were divided into two themes (see Table 2). The first theme aimed to provide an understanding of the student's perspective on their learning while the second theme aimed to provide an understanding of the impact of the environment on their learning.

4.1. Theme 1: Personal Barriers

Our research has shown two primary characteristics of today's college student: hedonistic learning and a lack of concentration and direction.

4.1.1. Sub-Theme 1: Approach towards Life and Society

Hedonistic is a philosophical idea that refers to the ultimate disposition of the human being to seek joy and avoid pain and stress. In the context of education, students who do this may exhibit pleasure-seeking and avoidance behaviour that might be stressful (like studying). The majority of the research participants noted that most students spend their time playing and delay their studies until the last minute. Some of the participants highlighted the significance of age, pointing out that the majority of undergraduates are still in their early twenties and could be driven to make the most of their lives.

"I think most of them are 20, 21,23 and they do not want to miss out, I guess, the experience that I experience by young people because young people want to have fun when they are still young they want to have fun, they want to experience a flow, something new I guess, and then, they may think that when they reach 30 they want to settle down with their family"(student 4, 21).

Similar ideas have been described by other respondents under the name of the "comfort zone".

Many students tend to avoid anything that might cause them stress or inconvenience based on our findings. One of the respondents suggested that their inability to control their lives might trigger them to procrastinate, so they can escape from their reality.

"I guess it is because they want to escape from reality because they just do not know how to control it"(student 1, 80).

Lecturer 1 suggests that students may not be willing to go and ask the lecturers and other students, so they end up procrastinating as a sort of cop-up mechanism.

"Maybe they have been like, you know, a coping strategy for them if they used to go through with those things. For example, if you need to go and understand things, you need to go and ask your lecturer and your friend around. You are not ready for that"(lecturer 1, 40).

Moreover, participants in the study saw that many students had a tendency to stay away from tasks or responsibilities that may be stressful or inconvenient for them. Several respondents proposed that the reason for their procrastination may be a distraction from reality based on their inability to take control of their own lives.

Additionally, it was also recognized that many students tend to be followers rather than leaders and are disposed to be dependent on their lecturers. This dependency can manifest in different ways such as a fear of not complying with others or a strong desire for validation and acceptance. Furthermore, students often feel that they are incapable of making any real changes in their world leading to a sense of helplessness. For example, one of the students stated that they were having problems with a teacher but they thought that there was no need to complain because nothing would change.

" That is Malaysian culture, fear of being different, fear of being ostracized, fear of being ostracized and treated as the enemy of community"(lecturer 3 and 24).

"Always seeking approval from the government, from the organization and from the parents so they will not do some kind of over-rule ideas towards the culture that is being formed for them. That is the value" (lecturer 2 and 71).

" My parents were actually on my side, they told me that you could make a complaint. But my dad was so realistic he said" You know what? There is no point. Because trust me, they will actually listen to me, and they will ignore you, push you and then shut you down"(focus group 2, 171).

4.1.2. Sub-Theme 2: Educational Purpose

According to some research participants, a majority of students may not prioritize gaining knowledge but rather focus on achieving good grades or obtaining a certificate. Additionally, some students may attend university solely to fulfil the expectations of their families. Furthermore, the students do not seem to perceive a sense of responsibility towards society. In group discussions, it was noted that students do not actively participate in societal events for the benefit of society but rather for the merit points or certificates they would receive. It was suggested that if events were not associated with such rewards, participation would be low.

" There is always emphasis, this pressure on students [that] after high school they must get the degree. And it is just the objective of getting the degree, it does not mean that you need to be the best at it. As long as you get the degree which is kind of like a title? Is not like, oh, you have 4 pointers! " (student 4, 20).

" You know. Maybe because the student's parents, unfortunately, are not fortunate enough to continue their studies, they want a better education for their children and then their children do not have any choice but to continue. So, in their mind, okay as long as I get the degree my parents will be happy" (student 4, 21).

" Mem 3: Most of them join because of the merit point.

Me: Not really, because they care about [the goodness] of society.

Mem 2: A certificate will be provided and merit point will be provided.

Mem 1: Of course, everybody will come. When you say that. Try to make a program when you say that you want to know about mental health things"(focus group 2, 123-126).

4.2. Theme Two: Environmental Barriers

The theme of environmental barriers aims to investigate the role of the environment in student learning and is divided into six sub-themes: 1) lack of freedom for developing critical thinking, 2) fostering student dependency, 3) the influence of the university and regulations, 4) the role of family, 5) lecturers' attitudes and 6) teaching methods.

4.2.1. Sub-Theme 1: Lack of Freedom for Developing Critical Thinking

One of the research participants argues that critical thinking is not being promoted in Malaysia due to both limitations set by schools and a lack of awareness among lecturers. Schools in Malaysia appear to inhibit critical thinking by setting strict boundaries for students while lecturers may not possess the knowledge to facilitate critical thinking in their classes. Additionally, a few students complained that they were unable to ask questions or have discussions about particular topics in class because they were afraid of getting poor scores.

"Critical thinking inside the box, Of course, in school there are what they call higher-order thinking skills which can be viewed as critical thinking. But critical thinking in Malaysia must happen within the boundaries"(lecturer 3 and10).

According to one lecturer, Malaysians prefer to follow rather than ask questions.

"Like, we just like love to follow. We do not question much so that kind of thing I mean. So maybe that affects a little bit how people look at this directed learning. Maybe they see it as difficult for them " (lecturer 1and 69).

4.2.2. Sub-Theme 2: Fostering Student Dependency

The findings of the research suggest that there is a prevalent issue of dependency among Malaysian students. This may be attributed to the fact that these students have been provided with all the resources and answers in an objective manner from a young age without being allowed to explore and learn on their own.

"For me, spooning is one reason for demotivation for students to be self-learners. Because everything is given. That is the simple one. " (students 5 and 47).

"Students are coming from school and school has taught them to look for an objective answer and an objective answer means they need to get information that is tailor-made and fits the answer. So usually it does not mean reflective reading." (lecturers 3 and 4).

4.2.3. Sub-Theme 3: The Role of the University System and Regulation

Some research participants have observed that lectures are usually too long resulting in minimal opportunity for students to relax and do their coursework.

Additionally, many students have reported feeling overwhelmed by the number of assignments they are required to complete.

"I think if you want to be a self-directed learner, what you have to always have been time. So, I think the credit hour is killing me." (students 3 and 55).

"And they have to rush to another class, some did not have their lunch, why can you have at least one-hour break? So, that's another reason why it demotivates students to concentrate." (focus group 2, 80).

4.2.4. Sub-Theme 4: The Role of the Family

Research participant student 4 states that students from a lower socio-economic background may have a stronger motivation to succeed in their studies as they do not have the financial safety net that those from more affluent backgrounds possess.

"Purpose or maybe, maybe, life hardship I guess because students come from poor families. They have no choice but to study hard, to focus on their studies and to get and focus on their dream. They must reach; they do not have a choice "(student 4 and 28).

One student highlights the challenges of family expectations and their impact on educational choices. She shares her personal experience of wanting to study psychology but facing resistance from her mother who wanted her to study accounting. Ultimately, she was able to resolve the issue and pursue her desired field of study. Other

participants also noted the importance of family education background in influencing a student's motivation to become a self-directed learner. Their findings indicate that students from families with higher education backgrounds tend to be more motivated to be self-directed in their learning.

"I got like, old-fashioned parents did not encourage them to choose what they were interested in or the course they were interest in taking to study. That is the point, like, parents forcing you to choose the course that they would hope you would choose. [that you have to follow] and then you must study for them. " (focus group 1, 145).

During one of the focus groups, the research participant asserted that Asian families tend to compare their children with each other. This could make some students feel unwanted.

"Mem1: Asian parents are like that. Yeah, not just education wise but everything they like to compare.

Mem2: Everything , the way you talk, the way you sit sometimes.

Mem1: Look at her, look at him why are you not like them, okay then adopt him.

Mem2: They make you feel unwanted "(focus group 2, 263 to 266).

4.2.5. Sub-Theme 5: Lecturer's Attitude

Students also shared their frustration with the attitudes of some lecturers. They noted that these teachers may convey a sense of superiority, making demands of students without allowing for exploration or questioning. This can lead to a one-way communication style where students are expected to simply comply with what they are told. Additionally, students reported that if they dared to question or challenge their teachers, they may be met with humiliation or labelled as "stupid." Furthermore, students reported that some lecturers hold double standards where they are not lenient with students who are late to class, even if they have a valid reason but excuse themselves when they are late in uploading slides.

" You feel so micro-managed, they [like] micro-managed us"(focus group 2, 89).

"They have the superiority complex. I do not understand why, it is like, I am better than you, I am older than you. So, I can tell you anything" (focus group 2, 67).

" It is like we were like" excuse me Dr. I am sorry." They will be like" Why are you so stupid!" They would not say that. But indirectly, you end up feeling so down for asking a question that you were curious about. And that makes me, like, not want to ask anymore after that. So, the question you have tends to not ask, so you do not fully understand what you are learning." (focus group 2, 277).

" Let us say that we forgot to upload an assignment. They can do things like tear us apart but then the moment they forget, they are 4 weeks late at uploading one slide. they [act like] "Oh I am sorry, I forget, I am sorry. " (focus group 2, 91).

Besides, students believe that lecturers are unreliable. They might inform the student to come and discuss anything with them while ensuring that everything will be confidential. But after meeting with them and discussing your issues, they will keep gossiping and speaking badly about you. That is why most students never go to their lecturers to discuss their problems.

"Mem1: They are like, you know just from the mouth but not from the heart, they are like" Feel free to tell me, we are like friends we can share that, this" I have heard this many times, and they are still going to say shit behind you. They would be like" this student talks too much" like this."(focus group 2, 94).

They also highlight the negative impact of having a preferred student in the class. This occurs when a lecturer solely focuses on one student and ignores the others. As a result, when a question is asked, the preferred student is always given priority and the other students may feel demotivated.

"They are very biased. Some of the lecturers actually, I do not want to mention. Some of them are very biased. The student might feel how to say that unwanted. When the lecturers keep calling the same person over and over. So, the other student might be like, why is it always [him/her]." (focus group 2, 57).

4.2.6. Sub-Theme 6: Teaching Method

Research participants have identified some issues with the way that lecturers teach during class. Many students struggle with lecturers who simply read from slides rather than actively explaining the topic. One student commented, "I can read it on my own." This is particularly problematic for subjects that involve mathematical problems which require lecturers to explain each step-in detail. Additionally, some respondents report that lecturers often waste class time by engaging in irrelevant conversations with students leaving them feeling as though they have gained nothing from the class.

"I've seen tons of lecturers and the lecturers who do not. Who just reads from the slides and does not explain, elaborate, copy and paste from the textbook. Into the slides, even the font is dorm small "(student 1, 30).

"Mem 2: Come to the class. And then talk about something that is not relatable. I think you have also experienced it, right?

Me: Like what? Like

Mem 2: Certain subject. When the lecturer comes to class and then cheat-chat. And they are not going to the content of the lecturer slide" (focus group 1, 84 to 86).

Another issue identified by research participants is the lack of connection between the material being taught and its relevance to the students' lives. Some participants expressed frustration with studying theories that seemed to have no practical application or relevance to them. They feel that their lecturers are not effectively helping them to understand the importance of the subject.

"They do not use keywords, they do not elaborate and they do not give you a sense of direction for where you are trying ahead. They are not giving you a clear picture, maybe they did not discuss the course structure with you. The objective of the course subject you are taking, I guess "(students 1and 34).

5. Discussion

The current study provides a new perspective on the psycho-social barriers to developing student-centered learning in the Malaysian context. One psychological barrier identified is students' limited educational purpose which focuses on grades, certificates or fulfilling family wishes. According to Martela and Steger (2016) our purpose directs and gives meaning to our actions and the potential consequences of such a limited purpose that does not consider the value of learning are students who know how to score well on assessments but do not truly

understand the material. Norton* (2004) also notes that most assessments currently test only the lower levels of knowledge such as recall and simple application. Biggs (1996) points out that students tend to learn what is on their assessments not what is in the curriculum.

Additionally, students' inclination to stay in their comfort zones, avoiding stress or conflicts with previous studies that show how face-keeping and student shyness can affect their learning (Ahmad & Majid, 2010a, 2010b).

The study also identifies three psycho-social barriers that may decrease students' intrinsic motivation. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), society must fulfil students' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to develop their intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). These barriers include teaching students to be overly dependent on others, not allowing them to explore on their own, not providing opportunities for discussion and critical thinking and forcing students to comply with and internalize societal values in an introverted manner.

Additionally, the study found that students may become demotivated due to lecturers' attitudes and teaching methods. According to the ARCS (attention, relevance, competition and satisfaction) model, students lose motivation when teaching is not attractive or relevant to them. Studies have also found that lecturers' periods, credit hours, and work overload can undermine students' motivation (Nasri, Halim, & Abd Talib, 2020; Yasmin et al., 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). This may also contribute to the development of collectivistic and high-power distance dimensions in Malaysian culture as identified by Hofstede's insights.

The current research might contribute to the advancement of knowledge surrounding the potential obstacles that could impede the implementation and proliferation of student-centered learning within the Malaysian educational landscape. In contrast to prior literature which predominantly concentrated on the perspectives of either teachers or learners, the current investigation offers a comprehensive exploration of both standpoints. Furthermore, the study delineates the individual and contextual barriers that may arise, thereby facilitating the development of strategic approaches to promote and enhance student-centered learning experiences.

However, the current findings cannot be generalized due to the qualitative nature of the paper. In addition, the use of a convenient sample while selecting participants may also hamper the generalization of the findings to other population.

The study's advantages and disadvantages should be briefly stated, including the inability to generalize the findings because convenience sampling was also used to choose study participants in addition to the qualitative technique this study used.

6. Conclusion

The current study highlights the subtle issues that may hinder the development of self-directed learning among Malaysian students. It recognizes that students' attitudes towards life and education might be part of the problem. At the same time, the culture and how students socialized might also play a role when students are not identifying or integrating social norms and expectations. Moreover, the transition from teacher-directed to self-directed and autonomous learning may be impeded by the lecturers' behaviours and views in the classroom.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Introduction to self-directed learning.

Self-directed learning is when people take control of their own learning. Instead of relying solely on teachers, self-directed learners decide what they need to learn, set their own goals, find the resources to learn, choose how they want to learn, and check if they have learned what they intended.

Key Behaviors of Self-Directed Learners

Self-directed learners:

1. Know What They Need to Learn: They think about what they need to learn and make clear goals for themselves.
2. Find Resources: They use books, the internet, and other sources to find the information they need.
3. Plan Their Learning: They organize their time and activities to make sure they learn what they set out to.
4. Think Critically: They think carefully about the information they find to decide if it's useful and true.
5. Adjust When Needed: If something isn't working, they change their plan to overcome challenges.
6. Reflect on Their Learning: They regularly think about what they've learned and how they can improve.
7. Work with Others: They talk to friends, teachers, and experts to get new ideas and feedback.