What is the Level of Self-Directed Learning among Junior High School Students?

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Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tingkat keterampilan *Self-Directed Learning* peserta didik SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan. *Self-Directed Learning* merupakan keterampilan penting yang memungkinkan peserta didik untuk belajar secara mandiri, mengambil inisiatif dalam memahami materi, serta mengembangkan strategi pembelajaran yang efektif. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah survei deskriptif dengan sampel sebanyak 224 peserta didik, yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *accidental sampling*. Pengumpulan data menggunakan skala *Self-Directed Learning* yang diadaptasi dari Henisa dan Restu Aulia Chairunnisa. Skala ini terdiri dari 30 item dengan lima indikator: *awareness, learning strategies, learning activities, evaluation,* dan *interpersonal skills*. Hasil analisis menunjukkan skor rata-rata *Self-Directed Learning* sebesar 75 (SD = 15). Sebanyak 9% peserta didik memiliki keterampilan *Self-Directed Learning*, 70% berada pada kategori sedang, dan 21% tergolong rendah. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa mayoritas peserta didik masih membutuhkan penguatan dalam keterampilan *Self-Directed Learning*. Faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap rendahnya *Self-Directed Learning* antara lain metode pembelajaran yang masih bersifat konvensional, kurangnya kesempatan bagi siswa untuk belajar mandiri, serta pola pendidikan yang masih didominasi oleh pendekatan *top-down*. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan inovasi dalam layanan bimbingan dan konseling guna meningkatkan keterampilan *Self-Directed Learning*, sehingga peserta didik dapat lebih siap menghadapi tantangan dalam dunia pendidikan dan pekerjaan.

Abstract. This study aims to describe the level of Self-Directed Learning skills of students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan. Self-Directed Learning is an important skill that enables students to learn independently, take the initiative in understanding the material, and develop effective learning strategies. The research method used was a descriptive survey with a sample of 224 students, selected using accidental sampling techniques. Data collection used the Self-Directed Learning scale adapted from Henisa and Restu Aulia Chairunnisa. This scale consists of 30 items with five indicators: awareness, learning strategies, learning activities, evaluation, and interpersonal skills. The analysis results showed an average Self-Directed Learning score of 75 (SD = 15). A total of 9% of students had Self-Directed Learning skills, 70% were in the moderate category, and 21% were classified as low. These findings indicate that the majority of students still need reinforcement in Self-Directed Learning skills. Factors contributing to low Self-Directed Learning include conventional learning methods, lack of opportunities for students to learn independently, and an education system that is still dominated by a top-down approach. Therefore, innovation in guidance and counseling services is needed to improve Self-Directed Learning skills, so that students can be better prepared to face challenges in education and work.

Key word: Self-Directed Learning; Learning Independence; Independent Learning; Learning Strategies, Guidance and Counseling.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of global change and conversion, individuals need to have 21st-century skills such as learning and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem solving, and so on. In addition, it is important for individuals to take responsibility for their own learning and to plan, maintain, evaluate, and transform it into lifelong learning (Şentürk, C., & Zeybek, G. 2019). Lifelong learning has become an essential need in this rapidly evolving era. A high level of lifelong learning enhances an individual's ability to acquire constantly changing information and use it successfully (Oguz & Ataseven, 2016). This requires individuals to have independent learning skills, where Self-Directed Learning plays an important role in helping to manage the learning process effectively. In the context of lifelong learning, this skill becomes increasingly important as the world continues to change rapidly, requiring individuals to constantly adapt and develop new competencies.

Self-Directed Learning is important because it allows individuals to independently identify their learning needs, set goals, and evaluate their achievements. Independence in learning is an important aspect that students need to master, because by being independent, they will be more responsible for themselves, the learning process, and the results obtained (Kemendikbudristek 2022). According to Knowles, this Self-Directed Learning ability is the result of creating experiences that empower learners to make decisions about the information they want to master (Robinson, J. D., & Persky, A. M. 2020). Self-Directed Learning emphasizes individual independence in managing one's own learning process, including setting goals, choosing strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Zhu, M., et al, 2020; Sze-Yeng & Hussian, 2010; Knowles, 1975). Thus, Self-Directed Learning allows learners to control their own learning process, enabling them to learn more effectively and according to their needs.

Therefore, strengthening Self-Directed Learning skills needs to be a primary concern. One factor that supports the strengthening of Self-Directed Learning is the existence of clear standards regarding student learning independence. Guidance and counseling services in educational institutions apply the Student Independence Competency Standards as a reference in assessing the level of independence in each aspect of development (Muhammad, 2021). The Student Independence Competency

Standards (SKKPD) emphasize that one aspect of development that must be achieved by junior high school/equivalent students is intellectual maturity. To achieve this developmental task, independence in learning is certainly needed. Students with high Self-Directed Learning abilities will experience an increase in learning compared to students who follow conventional learning (Sidmewa et al., 2021).

Junior high school is a transition from childhood to adolescence that is often associated with a brief developmental phase or transition that requires guidance. Adolescence is a period in which people experience significant physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development (Vankerckhoven et al., 2023). Therefore, in an educational environment, it is necessary to instill independent learning in junior high school students. However, the current education system is still largely oriented towards one-way learning, which makes students bored and less active. Students are reluctant to ask questions because they are afraid or confused, and are not well trained in developing ideas and solving problems (Putra, 2019).

Research conducted at UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli states that many students are lazy in learning and many of their social studies scores still meet the minimum passing criteria (KKM). This is due to the learning model that still uses the lecture method (Sarahono et al., 2024). Another study at SMP Muhammadiyah 12 GKB Gresik found problems in the field, namely that many students were not enthusiastic about learning, which affected their academic achievement because there were several cases of teachers applying conventional teaching systems (Sabrina & Amirudin, 2024). Meanwhile, in the future, education is predicted to be increasingly based on technology and broad access to information, so that students are required to have flexible and adaptive learning abilities (Sulistyowati & Astiati, 2024). This condition shows an urgent need to map and improve SDL in junior high school students in particular.

Based on the above description, the researcher focused this study on determining the level of self-directed learning skills of junior high school students today, considering that self-directed learning skills are a major factor in developing students' learning independence. In addition, this research can be used as a step to create innovative and creative guidance and counseling media according to the needs of students, namely to

develop Self-Directed Learning skills, especially at the junior high school (SMP) level, so as to minimize the emergence of new problems related to student learning.

METHODS

The subjects of this study were 224 seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan. The sampling procedure used a census or saturated sampling technique, which is a sampling technique where all members of the population are used as respondents in the study. Thus, all 224 seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan were involved as research samples. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to each class, resulting in 224 respondents. The method applied in this study was a descriptive survey. The descriptive survey method is a research method that takes samples from a population using a questionnaire as a data collection tool (Oktavia, F. T. A., & Qudsiyah, K., 2023). The scale used in this study was the Self-Directed Learning scale adopted from Henisa (2023) and adapted from the scale developed by Restu Aulia Chairunnisa (2016). This Self-Directed Learning scale measures five indicators, including (1) awareness, (2) learning strategies, (3) learning activities, (4) evaluation, and (5) interpersonal skills. Meanwhile, the alternative answer choices consist of very appropriate (VA), appropriate (A), inappropriate (I), and very inappropriate (VA). The data generated based on this scale was then analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the results of the scale distribution. The results obtained were a categorization of Self-Directed Learning levels as high, medium, and low, which were then used as an overview of the level of Self-Directed Learning skills among seventh- grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Baguntapan.

Table 1. Self-Directed Learning Scale Indicators

No	Indicator	Question Item		Number
		F	**UF**	
1	Awareness	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6		6
2	Learning Strategies	7, 8, 9, 11	10	5
3	Learning Activities (Learning Activities)	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	20	7
4	Evaluation	18, 19, 21, 23,	22	5
5	Interpersonal Skills	24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29	30	7
	Total			**30**

Table 2. Reference Criteria for Categorization Intervals

Score	Description
High	X > Mi + 1 SDi
Moderate	Mi - 1 SDi to < Mi + 1 SDi
Low	X < Mi - 1 SDi

To test validity, the researcher used Pearson's product moment correlation, which connects each item with its total score. The results of the instrument validity calculation were analyzed using a correlation coefficient table by applying a standard of 0.176. If the calculated r ≥ r table (0.176) with a significance level of 5%, the instrument can be declared valid. Conversely, if the calculated r ≤ r table (0.176) with a significance level of 5%, the instrument is declared invalid. Meanwhile, to test the reliability of the measuring instrument, the Cronbach's alpha measurement technique was used. Reliability was measured using a reliability coefficient between 0 and 1.00. The closer to 1.00, the higher the reliability level.

Table 3. Reliability Classification

Reliability	Classification
$0.80 \leq r11 \leq 1.00$	Very high reliability
$0.60 \leq r11 \leq 0.80$	High reliability
$0.40 \leq r11 \leq 0.60$	Moderate reliability
$0.20 \leq r11 \leq 0.40$	Low reliability
$0.00 \leq r11 \leq 0.20$	Very low reliability (unreliable)

Table 4. Reliability Results

CRONBACH'S ALPHA VALUE	0.92
STATUS	Very high reliability

Based on the reliability test results in Table 4, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha score is 0.92 and is categorized as very high reliability because it falls within the interval $0.80 \leq r11 \leq 1.00$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis of the Self-Directed Learning scale data distributed to 224 junior high school students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan, the following description was obtained:

Table 5. Categorization Reference

Description	Score
Mean	75
Standard Deviation	15
M – 1SDi	60
M + 1SDi	90

The following are the criteria categories used based on the *Self-Directed Learning* scale score categories:

a. High = $X > M + 1SDi$

$X > 75 + 15$

90 and above

b. Moderate =   (Mean – 1SDi) < Score < (Mean + 1SDi)

(75 - 15) X (75 + 15)

$60 < X < 90$

c. Low = $X < M < 1SDi$

$X < 60$

This study aims to describe the level of self-directed learning skills of students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan. Based on the results of the analysis of the self-directed learning scale data that was distributed to 224 students, the following results were obtained:

Table 6. Percentage of Self-Directed Learning

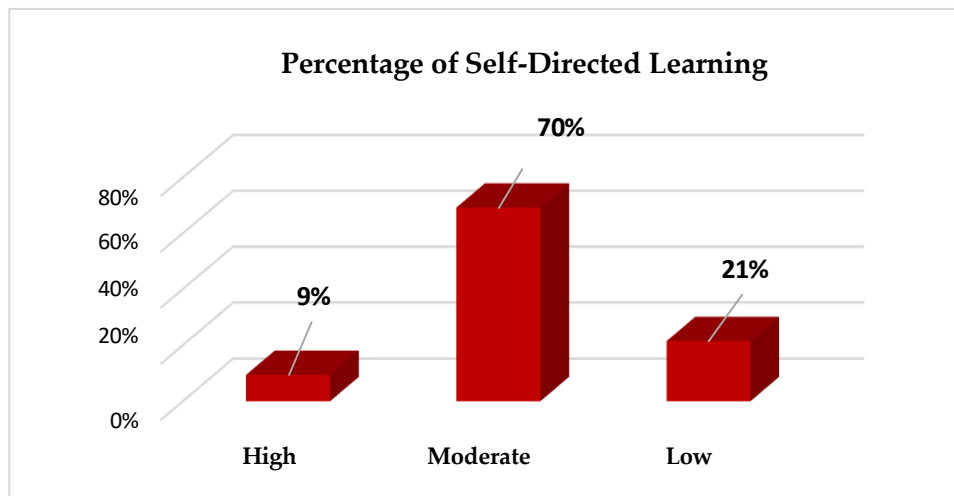| SDL Level Categorization		
Category	Number	Percentage
High	21	9
Medium	155	70
Low	48	21

Diagram 1. Frequency Distribution of Self-Directed Learning Scale Categorization

The categorization results show that out of 224 students, 21 students (9%) have high SDL skills, 155 students (70%) are in the moderate category, and 48 students (21%) are in the low category. Thus, 91% of students are still in the moderate and low categories, requiring reinforcement in Self-Directed Learning skills.

Furthermore, the item analysis results show that there are 10 statements with scores below the average (2.58), spread across five SDL indicators.
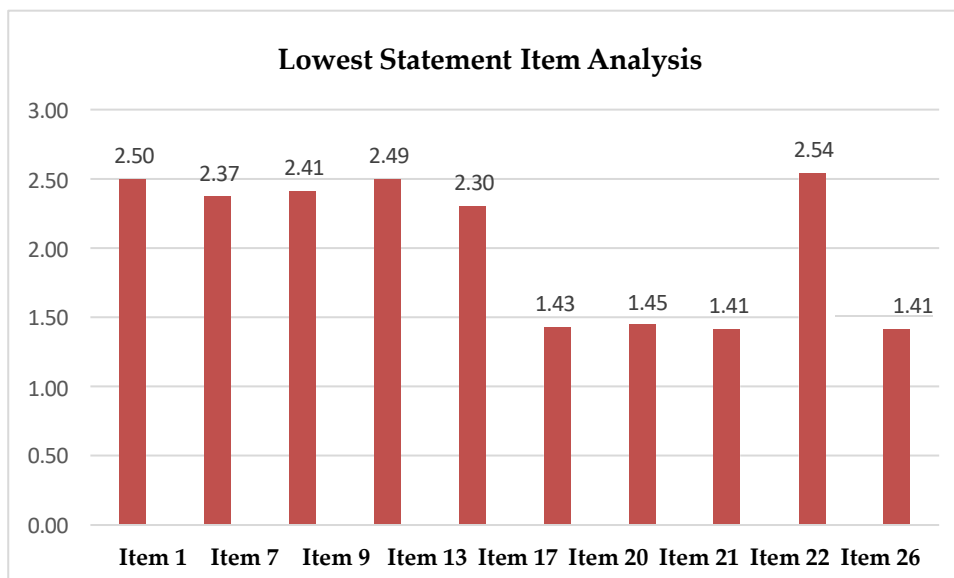

Diagram 2. Results of the Lowest Item Analysis of the Self-Directed Learning Scale

Table 7. Self-Directed Learning Percentage

Indicator	Item No.	Average Score	Category
Awareness	Item 1	2.5	Low
Learning Strategies	Item 7	2.37	Low
	Item 9	2.41	Low
Learning Activities	Item 13	2.49	Low
	Item 17	2.30	Low
	Item 20	1.43	Low
Evaluation	Item 21	1.45	Low
	Item 22	1.41	Low
Interpersonal skills	Item 26	2.54	Low
	Item 30	1.41	Low

This is reinforced by the item analysis in diagram two, which states that of the 5 indicators used, there are low scores that are less than the average of 2.58. There are 10 items that have scores below the average, including:

a. In Indicator 1, namely awareness in item 1, the score was 2.50

b. In Indicator 2, learning strategies in items 7 and 9 scored 2.37 and 2.41

c. For Indicator 3, learning activities, items 13, 17, and 20 scored 2.49, 2.30, and 1.43

d. Indicator 5, interpersonal skills, on items 26 and 30, scored 2.54 and 1.41

Based on these results, it can be concluded that students still face difficulties in identifying their learning needs, managing learning strategies independently, participating actively in learning activities, conducting self-evaluation, and developing interpersonal skills.

Given the low scores on several items, improvement strategies are needed that focus on increasing students' understanding, skills, and involvement in the learning process to support the improvement of Self-Directed Learning. To clarify the findings, the following is a summary of the discussion for each indicator:

Table 8. Discussion of Items with Low Scores on Each Indicator

Indicator	Low Items	Key Findings	Implications/Interventions
Awareness	Item 1: "I identify my own learning needs"	Students still have difficulty recognizing and determining their learning needs independently.	Training in self-reflection and the use of more interactive self-assessment tools is needed.

Learning Strategies	Item 7: *"I choose to take a break when faced with a lot of work.*" Item 9: *"I will continue to study even if there are no instructions from the teacher"*	Item 7 → students prefer to rest rather than seek alternative strategies (poor time management skills). Item 9 → students still depend on teacher instructions (low initiative for independent learning).	Interventions include time management training and the application of project-based learning methods that encourage independence, creativity, and motivation (Martati, 2022).
Learning Activities	Item 13: *"I guide myself in developing* understanding" Item 17: *"I ask relevant questions when learning in* class" Item 20: *"I can identify what I have mastered and what I have not mastered "*	Item 13 → not yet fully able to guide myself in understanding the material and managing learning activities. Item 17 → tends to be passive in the classroom learning process. Item 20 → Difficulty in reflecting on self-understanding.	Learning strategies that encourage active participation are needed, such as the discovery learning method to train reflection, understanding, and independent learning (Purwati, 2020).
Evaluation	Item 21: *"I feel offended when my work is corrected by my friends.*" Item 22: *"Success and failure motivate me to learn better."*	Item 21 → students tend to be defensive towards criticism and are less open to feedback. Item 22 → not yet able to use success or failure as motivation for learning.	Collaborative and interactive learning strategies, as well as reflective guidance, are needed to improve resilience in facing criticism and failure.

Interpersonal Skills	Item 26: *"I intend to learn more about the cultures and languages I often encounter."* Item 30: *"I always have difficulty communicating verbally"*	Item 26 → indicates a lack of interest in learning about the cultures and languages encountered in the learning process. Item 30 → learners have difficulty with oral communication, which affects their self-confidence.	Strategies such as group discussions, simulations, and cross-cultural project-based learning to improve oral communication skills and cross-cultural understanding.

The low results for Self-Directed Learning were also reinforced by interviews with guidance counselors, who stated that many students leave the classroom when given unsupervised assignments, often cheat, rely more on asking questions than reading, and are late in submitting assignments. These conditions indicate a low level of awareness of independent learning.

When compared to previous studies, these results are in line with the findings of Apriliana, W.A. (2022), which show that junior high school students tend to have low time management skills, and the findings of Nurhidayanti et al. (2022), which show that junior high school students still depend on teacher instructions in learning. In line with previous studies, self-reflection and learning initiative skills among middle school students are still relatively low. Sáez-Delgado et al. (2023) showed that students' self-regulated learning practices tend to be suboptimal, while Wu et al. (2024) emphasized that adolescents often have difficulty managing reflection and learning initiative, making it difficult for them to recognize their learning needs independently.

In addition, the application of project-based learning methods has been proven to increase learning independence, collaborative skills, and self-reflection abilities in students. The results of a meta-analysis conducted by Zhang and Ma (2023) show that project-based learning (PBL) has a significant positive impact on student learning

outcomes, particularly in increasing motivation, learning initiative, and higher-order thinking skills. Furthermore, research by Zhang, Shi, and Zhang (2023) found that PBL encourages improved collaboration through group interaction, cognitive awareness, and meaningful communication. These results support the intervention recommendations in this study, which emphasize the importance of active learning strategies, such as project-based learning and discovery learning, to foster learning independence.

Another contributing factor is the conventional learning environment, where teachers predominantly deliver material while students tend to be passive. Several studies show that top-down or teacher-centered learning patterns can hinder the development of students' critical thinking and independent learning skills, as they tend to limit active participation, reflection, and learning initiative (Cameron et al., 2022; Dwyer, 2023; Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2024). As a result, they find it difficult to understand complex situations and make decisions that require independent thinking (Yusuf, 2024). Therefore, learning skills that can foster students' independence and critical thinking are needed, one of which is through mastery of Self-Directed Learning.

Students with good Self-Directed Learning skills tend to be better prepared to face various learning challenges, both in formal and non-formal education. This is because Self-Directed Learning allows them to be more reflective, flexible, and able to manage the learning process independently, thereby supporting the mastery of higher-order thinking skills and complex problem solving (Finn et al., 2024). Self-Directed Learning readiness has also been proven to play an important mediating role in building a lifelong learning tendency, so that students with high Self-Directed Learning will be more consistent in developing themselves and adapting to new learning needs (Karataş, Şentürk, & Teke, 2021). In addition, self-directed learning is seen as an important competency in the modern era because it helps students understand their learning needs, provides clear direction for future goals, and increases satisfaction in the learning process.

Considering the above issues, guidance and counseling services should be optimized. Guidance and counseling services essentially function as preventive measures to increase students' learning awareness, help them understand their conditions, identify

their potential, and learn their skills. In addition, there must be responsive services when urgent problems arise. This will help students who need immediate assistance and reduce the difficulties they face when working on developmental tasks (Bhakti et al., 2018). Furthermore, guidance and counseling should be used to help students understand their weaknesses and strengths and direct their interests, talents, and skills (Mufidah et al., 2022).

These efforts should also require supporting measures that can be used to accommodate students in developing their Self-Directed Learning abilities. There are several new innovations that can be implemented to improve Self-Directed Learning, including: (1) Striving to develop a democratic learning process so that students feel valued; (2) Building students' activeness in making decisions at school; (3) Giving students the freedom to explore their curiosity in the school environment; (4) Accepting the strengths and weaknesses of each student without discriminating against others; (5) Establishing good relationships with students (Pradika, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the Self-Directed Learning (SDL) skills of students at SMP Negeri 3 Banguntapan still need to be improved, with the majority of students falling into the moderate and low categories. The main factor influencing this condition is the conventional learning method, which does not fully support student learning independence. Given the importance of SDL in improving students' independence and academic readiness, more intensive efforts are needed in guidance and counseling services. Guidance counselors can provide group guidance services with a game-based or project-based approach that emphasizes self-reflection, initiative, and collaborative work. On the other hand, schools can provide support by creating a more participatory learning climate, giving students space to choose their learning strategies, and integrating SDL improvement programs into the curriculum and extracurricular activities. In the future, further research can focus on developing and testing counseling- based interventions and innovative learning models to improve students' SDL more comprehensively. With these steps, it is hoped that students will

become more independent, have high learning motivation, and be better prepared to
face challenges in education and work in the future.

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