



The Current Situation of Self-Study Among Students at a University in Hanoi

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ABSTRACT:

Self-study is identified as a core competency that needs to be fostered and developed in students within the framework of the new general education program to enhance learners' abilities. Meanwhile, effective self-study remains a significant challenge for university students. This article discusses the recent research findings on this topic. A survey was conducted to understand the current situation of self-study and the influencing factors on this status among a sample of 350 students from various departments at a university in Hanoi.

Keywords: *Self-study, self-study activities, university students, self-study activities of university students, effectiveness.*

1. Introduction

Training methods under the credit-based education system inherently emphasize fostering proactive learning in students, with self-study being a decisive factor in their academic achievement at the university level. Additionally, educational reforms in our country emphasize the development of self-study capabilities in students, portraying them as individuals capable of self-organization and effective self-management in their learning activities, while teachers play a supportive role. This places a clear demand on teacher training, as self-study is one of the fundamental aspects of the teaching profession, and it is an important area that prospective education students need to be trained and developed in to meet the demands of their future careers.

Self-study provides the material conditions for students to turn their learning motivation into tangible outcomes, fostering self-confidence, sustaining positive cognitive awareness, and cultivating the qualities and demeanor of researchers to contribute scientifically to resolving social and professional issues.

The significance of this issue has attracted attention from educational researchers in recent times to elucidate the aspects needing improvement in the current situation and the factors influencing students' self-study (Dung, 2016; Hoa, 2013; Mai, 2016; Sen, 2015; Tung, 2015). Evaluation results from instructors indicate that students face the most difficulties in skills such as finding and researching study materials (scoring 2.50 out of 5), and in utilizing effective self-study methods such as engaging in scientific research, for instance, (Scoring 2.64 out of 5) (Dung, 2016; Mai, 2016); in terms of average physical time spent on self-study at home: it is common for students to spend from 1 to less than 2 hours (36.9%) and from 2 to less than 3 hours (18.9%); the remaining 64 out of 214 students (29.9%) spend less than 1 hour studying at home, with only 4.2% of students dedicating over 4 hours to self-study daily (sen, 2015). Students also self-evaluate the lowest in skills related to preparing mindset and motivation for self-study (scoring 2.38 out of 5), preparing self-study tools/conditions (scoring 2.30 out of 5), and constructing a scientific study-rest regime (scoring 2.40 out of 5). . . (Dung, 2016, Hoa, 2013). Studies also point out some basic factors contributing to ineffective self-study, such as: lack of a conducive learning environment, lack of guidance on self-study skills, and lack of necessary conditions for self-study such as study materials, study space, etc. Especially, most students in the study expressed a desire for guidance on effective study skills.

For students at this university, understanding the current state of self-study among students is essential to identify effective methods of guiding self-study. This is particularly important when approaching the study of the issue from a new perspective, such as psychological approach. Accordingly, self-study is a psychological-cognitive activity, so for this activity to be effective, learners must apply psychological factors to the self-study process. The findings obtained will serve as valuable suggestions for the research team to develop training content for students on effective self-study skills.

2. Some basic concepts

a/ The concept of self-study has both broad and narrow meanings. In this study, self-study is understood in a narrow sense, wherein it refers to the process in which learners address learning tasks outside of class hours as instructed by teachers, or the process in which learners autonomously and independently effectively tackle the learning tasks assigned by teachers. According to this understanding, self-study is considered as a stage or phase of the learning process (Hai, 2015, Oanh, 2012).

To understand the essence of self-study activities, it is necessary to start from an understanding of the nature of learning activities. In foreign literature, the understanding of "self-study" is always analyzed in relation to the concept of "learning". Accordingly, "Learning" in the school method is a form of cognitive activity, a form of psychological activity aimed at acquiring societal experiences - general history, knowledge, skills, and techniques in particular, preparing students to become genuine subjects of labor activities. It is controlled by the voluntary purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills, techniques, methods of acquiring knowledge, forms of behavior, certain activities, and values. This specific activity has a basic, direct purpose, which is "learning" and learning with intentionality. Therefore, this activity can only be carried out when individuals reach a level where they can adjust their actions for a conscious purpose (around 5-6 years old). The essence of learning is a positive, independent, creative cognitive process, aimed at making changes to the subject themselves by changing the object of activity. The driving force behind learning is the motivations arising from personal needs, including more importantly those associated with satisfying cognitive needs and utilizing knowledge to achieve specific practical purposes (Dung, 2016, Hoa, 2013; Mai, 2016, Oanh, 2012).

According to the aforementioned understanding, self-study is a psychologically-based activity. Therefore, for self-study to be effective, learners must apply psychological factors to the self-study process. On this point, Prof. Dr. Nguyen Canh Toan elaborated comprehensively by stating that self-study is when individuals mobilize their entire personalities for learning (Toan, 2002). As a psychological activity, self-study always has a defined subject; it is conducted by the agent (each student must initiate their own work); it operates indirectly through technical tools (knowledge of techniques, machinery, technological skills) and psychological tools (speech, writing, numbers, symbols, images. . .); it has a defined purpose; it has a social-historical nature (operated within social relationships); it has a material basis in the brain and the high-level neural activity of the brain (utilizing neural energy, activating brain functions, sensory functions. . .); it has high interactivity (carried out in diverse and varied human relationships) (Oanh, 2012).

b/ The concept of university students in pedagogical universities is understood as individuals who are studying in pedagogical universities. They are learners who are acquiring knowledge and skills in pedagogy to become future teachers (cited in Dung, 2016, Mai, 2016).

c/ The concept of self-study activities of university students in pedagogical universities is understood as the process in which each individual student autonomously and independently organizes a series of consecutive actions, starting from defining the purpose of self-study to planning, organizing the implementation of self-study plans, self-assessment, and evaluating the results of self-study to draw lessons and adjust the self-study process effectively to solve their own learning tasks. The self-study activities of university students in pedagogical universities have some basic characteristics, namely: demonstrating a completely proactive, self-conscious role of the learner; having clear goals and plans; having diverse content; taking place in various environments and rich contexts; using various methods and means; and evaluating results through the implementation of specific learning tasks.

At the university level, self-study is seen as the bridge between learning and scientific research, because the learning process of students in universities is essentially a cognitive research process (Dung, 2016, Hoa, 2013; Mai, 2016, Toan, 2002). In the learning process, each student must independently grasp the system of knowledge and skills, master the fundamentals of their future profession, and have the potential to adapt to immediate and long-term social demands. Identifying goals, developing motivation, selecting appropriate self-study methods and forms is necessary, but for students' learning activities to achieve quality and effectiveness, students must have self-study knowledge and skills.

d/ Effectiveness

According to the Vietnamese dictionary, "Effectiveness" is the relationship between the achieved results and the resources used. An activity is considered effective when it achieves its goals with minimal time and resource consumption (Y, 1998). Therefore, effective self-study is when individuals achieve their learning goals without feeling tired, stressed, and without excessive financial costs.

Self-study is the internal material condition for students to turn their self-study motivations into specific results and make students confident in themselves, develop interest, and maintain positive cognitive awareness, cultivate the qualities and demeanor of researchers to scientifically contribute to solving practical social and professional problems (Toan, 2002). These suggest many specific measures to enhance students' self-study abilities, such as integrating into training programs; creating a positive learning environment; organizing student scientific research; innovating assessment methods and training; learning from mistakes. Similarly, organizing training activities to enhance self-study skills for students is also proposed: Integrating self-study training content into the teaching process of lecturers; attracting students to participate in lecturers' scientific research; incorporating guidance into orientation courses for new students.

3. Research Results on the Current Situation of Self-study among Students at a university in Hanoi

3.1. Research Methods, Sample Subjects, and Study Content

Research methods used: Literature and document review; written surveys; analysis of activity outcomes; in-depth interviews; mathematical statistics.

Research sample subjects: 350 first and second-year students from departments including Human resource management, Accounting, Information and technology, Social work, and 32 lecturers.

Research content: (a) Students' perceptions of the role of self-study; (b) The current status of some basic self-study skills among students.

3.2. Results Obtained from Practical Research

a/ Results regarding the current perception of the role of self-study among students

Table 1. Students' opinions on the significance of self-study

	Level	First year (N=200)		Second year (N=150)	
		Number	%	Number	%
1	Very important	20	10	35	23.3
2	Important	121	60.5	94	62.6
3	Not important	59	29.5	21	4.0

The analysis of the results from Table 1 indicates that the majority of students have a good understanding of the importance of self-study, although there is a difference in opinion between first-year and second-year students. Furthermore, a significant portion of the students surveyed have recognized when the need for self-study arises for them, but the results in Table 2 show that this awareness has not been well reflected in actual self-study practices. Although the need for awareness may arise, it is not sufficient to translate into a positive inclination towards self-study for a considerable number of students. This is also seen as one of the major challenges for students, which is creating motivation for self-study.

Table 2: Students' opinions on the timing of the emergence of the need for self-study (N = 350)

The time of emergence of the need for self-learning	Number	%
When there's a need to solve a specific exercise	271	77.5
When encountering unfamiliar content that needs to be learned	232	66.2
When wanting to deepen understanding of a known study subject	292	83.4
Curiosity about the unknown without feeling compelled to know	301	86.0
When hearing various opinions on an issue	239	68.2
When entertaining, traveling	213	60.8
When being considered lacking understanding of a certain issue	185	52.8
When feeling dissatisfied with a comment about an issue	159	45.4
When needing to find additional employment.	151	43.1
When achieving a specific learning goal.	305	87.1
When needing to engage in social networks.	124	35.4
When needing to find short-term training courses.	109	31.1
When your girlfriend/boyfriend requests.	169	48.2

Additionally, from here, students realize they need guidance from instructors for self-study when they:

Recognize a deficiency in self-study skills (75.4%);

Realize there is a gap in their knowledge (64.9%);

Acknowledge the need to fill knowledge gaps with information (60.5%);

Recognize their own self-study efforts are ineffective (81%);

Understand that the information they find is suitable for their information needs (79.1%);

Recognize a lack of confidence in using information for learning (61.2%).

b/ Results regarding the current situation of self-study planning and time management for self-study.

Table 3. The current status of students' self-study planning

	Type of plan	Degree					
		Yes		Sometimes yes, sometimes no		No	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	According to the academic year	50	25	70	35	80	40

2	Semester-based	65	32.5	85	42.5	50	25
3	Monthly	80	40	100	50	20	10
4	Weekly	120	60	70	35	10	5
5	Subject-based	135	67.5	60	30	5	2.5

The results of the student survey in the research sample indicate that currently, students are hardly concerned about making study plans, especially long-term study plans. Up to 40% of students consider "Annual Planning" to be unimportant. They tend to focus on planning their studies by semester, month, or subject; however, this focus is limited to only a small portion of proficient students. This reflects students' perception of the role of study planning in the credit-based training system. It also indicates a lack of initiative in self-study activities, particularly in managing and organizing study time effectively.

Moreover, in terms of form, most students do not know how to create a proper plan that reflects their goals and feasibility when implemented. The plans, if any, are simple and lack motivation because students do not know how to apply psychological factors to build effective plans. These results suggest the need to develop training content for students on effective self-study planning skills.

In response to the question "Please quickly list the three things you regret most for not being able to do during the last semester break," the answers obtained from students have been sorted in descending order as follows (with the most common answer ranked first):

Academic results not meeting expectations (scoring lower than predicted).

Unable to do certain planned activities due to lack of time (such as extra English study, extra computer study, learning additional life skills).

Inability to assist parents/family members in some family matters due to time constraints.

Limited opportunities to meet friends, attend some reunions with high school friends, or interact with students from other universities in the city due to academic commitments.

Unable to keep up with social news due to insufficient time for reading newspapers.

Lack of attention to helping younger siblings in their studies due to personal workload.

Occasionally neglecting self-care due to constant busyness with academic and other commitments.

The main reason listed by students is wasting time in various ways, such as sleeping, excessively using mobile phones, chatting with friends, hanging out, browsing the internet (reading news, chatting), playing sports (badminton, chess), or watching movies.

When asked to list two behaviors they feel they need to change the most, the majority of students responded as follows:

The first behavior they want to change is to have clear study plans for themselves, especially setting study goals. They have been accustomed to studying in a "go-as-you-learn" manner without clear direction. For example, they do not consider how a particular subject is relevant to their future career.

The second behavior they want to change is to actively manage their time to accomplish related academic tasks. They often procrastinate or make excuses due to lack of time, leading to rushing tasks at the last minute and receiving criticism from teachers about the progress of their assignments.

When asked "How have you been studying since entering university?" most students in the research sample responded as follows:

Setting goals for each subject, such as aiming for grades from satisfactory and above, but without specific plans for implementation. Goals are set mentally rather than written down.

Following the weekly timetable. They study each subject sequentially according to the tasks assigned by the lecturer (homework), without having their own study plan.

Only truly studying when exams approach, resulting in stress and health issues. After exams, they often experience weight loss, fatigue, and sometimes have to retake exams, reflecting the inefficiency of their self-study activities.

Table 4 presents students' opinions on allocating daily physical time for self-study. These results suggest the need to develop student training content on effective time management skills and address procrastination in self-study activities.

Table 4. Students' opinions on daily self-study time

Self-study time	Level of implementation (N = 350)	
	Number	%
More than 6 hours/ day	12	6
5-6 hours/ day	20	10
3-4 hours/ day	43	21.5
1-2 hours/ day	125	62.5
Don't know/ don't care	150	42.8

c/ The current situation of content development and students' use of self-study methods

Table 5. Students' self-study content development

	Contents	Number	%
1	The sequence of lessons in the classroom	113	56.5
2	According to the questions in the textbook.	57	28.5
3	According to the review content, exams.	200	100
4	According to the guidance of the instructor.	200	100
5	According to personal preference.	60	30.0

Self-study content includes all learning activities conducted by individuals or possibly by groups of students outside of regular class hours. It can be said that the workload of self-study for students is substantial, and the nature of these activities is diverse. Students spend a considerable amount of time studying in class. Therefore, students often face difficulties in resolving conflicts between: class time and self-study time; self-study time and time for other activities (entertainment, sports, cultural and social activities); volume requirements and quality requirements of tasks; academic demands and physical health requirements; academic demands and necessary conditions. Therefore, having a scientific self-study plan and a reasonable timetable will bring about the desired effectiveness and quality for self-study and research.

From the data table above, the level of students' self-study content development is limited and lacks initiative and self-awareness, relying on imposition from instructors or examination programs. When asked for the reasons, some students attribute this to a lack of guidance from instructors on how to develop self-study content. Instructors primarily focus on completing teaching tasks in class. Sometimes, instructors assign homework but do not subsequently evaluate students' completion.

Table 6. Students' opinions on the use of self-study methods

Self-study methods	Order of importance (%)			Use
	<i>Important</i>	<i>Less important</i>	<i>Not important</i>	
Through mistakes	25.0	50.0	25.0	2.43
Through research	10.5	15.8	73.7	2.06
Through group work	68.4	31.6	0	2.66

To excel in self-study, the method of self-study is a crucial factor. Having good study methods will serve as the foundation to help learners organize their self-study activities most effectively. After compiling and analyzing the data obtained, students self-evaluate (Table 6).

A more detailed analysis reveals various specific manifestations of students' study methods, including:

Memorizing lecture notes.

Reading textbooks and related materials before class.

Reading textbooks and reference materials after class.

Reading materials as instructed or requested by instructors.

Actively seeking related materials on the subject matter.

Creating outlines or summaries after each study session or topic.

Actively participating in group discussions.

Exchanging doubts with peers and instructors.

Actively applying theories to solve exercises, practices, or real work situations.

Studying according to personal preferences.

Overall, self-study among students at Hanoi National University of Education (in the research sample) still heavily relies on the information provided by teachers. Students' engagement in reading textbooks, reference materials, and actively seeking related study materials is limited, often concentrated among high-achieving students. Group discussions are also not conducted frequently. Reading materials before class is an essential and necessary activity, as it helps students understand the subject matter better and absorb the knowledge from teachers more quickly, but this activity is not given enough attention by students. Delving into reading skills, note-taking, and retaining study materials also requires attention. For instance, reading is a psychological activity influenced by various mental functions, but students do not know how to effectively organize this activity, resulting in inefficiency: wasted time, failure to remember or understand the information read. Additionally, students may have habits that hinder effective reading. This area also needs to be nurtured.

d/ The current situation of self-assessment and evaluation of one's self-study activities

Table 7: Students' opinions on the extent of using the purposes of self-study methods

	Reasons	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)
1	Assessing the students' understanding of the lesson.	76.7	20.0	3.30
2	Control student behavior and classroom management	46.7	43.3	10.0
3	Assessing students' progress	60.0	33.3	6.70
4	Classifying students	40.0	36.7	23.3
5	Planning, adjusting the teaching process	53.3	40.0	6.70
6	Diagnosing students' learning difficulties	50.0	36.7	13.3
7	Feedback and encouragement for students	80.0	13.3	6.70

Table 8: Methods used by students to collect feedback from instructors on self-study outcomes

Methods	Mean	SD
Ask where they meet	2.70	0.13
Write a letter	2.30	0.31
Write a letter or make a phone call to request an appointment and meet in person	2.90	0.83
Request an appointment, outline the matter you wish to discuss beforehand, and meet in person	2.85	0.32
Request an appointment, specify the matter you'd like to discuss beforehand, meet in person, and ask for a follow-up meeting if needed	2.10	0.41

In effective self-study, learners need to regularly self-assess and adjust their self-study activities. This self-assessment can be conducted through discussions with peers, instructors, or through the results of tests and exams. Similarly, on the part of the instructors, through the self-study outcomes of students, instructors aim to achieve certain goals related to regular assessment activities in class.

The data obtained in this section shows that up to 45% of students in the research sample do not pay attention to this aspect; the remaining students occasionally exchange feedback with peers or instructors, or self-assess, but not significantly. The habit of self-assessment and evaluation of self-study outcomes needs to be developed because if done well (in terms of applying psychological factors), it will create important motivation to enhance the effectiveness of self-study among students. Feedback from instructors is essential, and students have high expectations for instructors, but the methods students use to collect feedback, as shown in Table 8, are not as effective.

4. Conclusion

Students in the research sample have a correct understanding of the importance of self-study and recognize the need for developing effective self-study skills. A portion of the students in the research sample has organized self-study activities as a continuation of classroom learning. However, some self-study skills performed by students are not truly effective because they lack knowledge of the psychological foundations of learning in general, and self-study in particular.

The results of the survey suggest that the research team should propose some content to enhance the effectiveness of self-study for students at our university, with an approach to psychological aspects of learning in self-study activities.

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