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## **Improve Student Proactivity –Important Solutions to Improve Quality in Credit-Based Training**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Training by credit-based system is a progressive modality of training in the world. The essence of this modality training is enhancing activeness and self-motivation of students. This study presents the nature of training by credit-based system, advantages and disadvantages of this system, contemporary situation and solution to raise self-motivated of students. The research data was collected from 500 students in regular majors of Hanoi University. In addition, we refer some opinions and research data of specialists and lectures in some other universities. The result showed that the imperative problem of training by credit-based system was how to raise self-motivation of students. This is one of the important solutions to increase quality of training by credit-based system.

**Keywords:** *credit, credit-based education, self-motivated of students, study plan*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Credit training is an advanced training method in the world gender. This training method was born in 1872 at Harvard University (USA). After that, the credit system was applied more and more widely in universities. Study in many countries around the world such as North America, the European Union, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Senegal, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Cameroon, China, etc.

In Vietnam, Government Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP dated November 2, 2005, on fundamental and comprehensive renovation of Vietnamese higher education for the period 2006-2020 clearly states: "Establishing and implementing a transition roadmap to credit-based education system, creating favorable conditions for learners to accumulate knowledge, switch professions, transfer credits to further levels of education both domestically and internationally." Currently, most universities in our country have adopted credit-based education with varying degrees of implementation.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Training issued the "Regulations on Higher Education and College Education Undergraduate Training under the Credit System" (Issued with Decision No. 43/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT dated August 15, 2007, by the Minister of Education and Training). According to the ministry's direction, 2011 was the final deadline for relevant institutions to transition to this new training system.

Following the nationwide progress, Hanoi University has undergone two stages of implementing credit-based education: (1) The transition phase was carried out from the academic year 1995-1996; (2) The comprehensive implementation of credit-based education was carried out from the academic year 2007-2008. Unlike many universities nationwide, Hanoi University has rigorously applied credit-based education to all disciplines, courses, and training programs. In addition to changing the training management mechanism, the university has also actively reduced the number of credits in the curriculum. For the 4-year training program, the university has reduced from 210 credits (academic year 1995-1996) to 138 credits (academic year 2007-2008), 136 credits (academic year 2008-2009), and 120 credits (from academic year 2010-2011).

Throughout the implementation of credit-based education, a crucial issue arises: enhancing the autonomy of students - the central figure in the education system. Stemming from practical needs, we conducted a study on the topic: "Current Situation and Solutions to Enhance Student Autonomy in Credit-based Education at Hanoi University" to contribute to improving the quality of credit-based education at Hanoi University specifically and the higher education system nationwide in general.

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### **2. METHODOLOGY**

The main research method we employed in this study is surveying students' opinions on credit-based education. Specifically, the research team conducted a survey of 500 students from various majors under the regular training system of Hanoi University using a questionnaire. The questionnaire structure consists of 31 questions with 182 criteria in three types of opinions: evaluation opinions on a 5-level scale (5 - very high, 4 - high, 3 - moderate, 2 - low,

1 - very low); opinions on selecting options; opinions providing information. The survey subjects were selected using random sampling method. All survey responses were input and analyzed using SPSS software.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The essence of the credit-based education system is the individualization of students' learning. While in the traditional curriculum-based education, all students in a major and cohort study the same courses according to a common timetable arranged by the university, in the credit-based education system, students have the right to decide their entire course plan for the duration of their studies as well as their semester-by-semester study plans according to their academic abilities and specific circumstances. This means that each student has their own timetable. This organization method, referred to by researchers as the "buffet principle," allows students to select the courses they want to take each semester or academic year. This new principle of organization ensures that the education process in universities becomes more flexible, while also facilitating the design of articulation programs between different levels of education and across different majors. The results of our survey regarding students' opinions on the advantages of credit-based education are as follows:

**Table 1: Student opinions on the advantages of training under the credit system**

Unit: %

Criteria Level	Individualize learning	Students proactively plan their studies	Flexible program	Active students	Possibility to study 2 majors	Skip grades	Have free time	Enhance communication
Very low	0.2	0.2	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.4	1.0	1.6
Low	1.4	2.6	9.7	4.0	7.6	5.0	8.9	12.3
Moderate	19.4	13.0	45.9	27.1	18.8	15.8	26.0	33.8
High	52.7	40.6	34.8	49.2	37.7	46.3	41.7	36.2
Very high	26.3	43.6	8.7	19.1	35.7	32.5	22.4	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Direct survey data

The credit-based education system provides students with more dynamic and adaptive capabilities to cope with rapid changes in modern society. While in the traditional curriculum-based education, students are entirely passive and follow the school's study plan, in the credit-based education system, students are required to actively construct a suitable and effective learning plan and method for themselves.

In the credit-based education system, the learning outcomes of students are assessed based on the accumulation of credits from individual courses rather than by academic years. Therefore, failing a course does not impede the learning process, as students only need to retake the courses they have not met the requirements for without having to repeat the entire academic year, as in the traditional curriculum-based education. Thus, credit-based education is more cost-effective and efficient compared to the traditional system.

Credit-based education introduces a new type of class called "course-based class," where students who register for the same course study together. These classes consist of students from different cohorts and majors, providing a great opportunity for students to interact, learn from each other, and expand their social relationships. As the Vietnamese saying goes, "Learning from teachers is not as good as learning from friends." Our survey on the opportunities for exchange and learning among cohorts and majors in credit-based education revealed that 33.8% agreed at a moderate level, 36.2% agreed at a high level, and 16.1% agreed at a very high level. Therefore, the overall agreement rate across all three levels is 86.1%.

As shown above, the credit system allows students to decide their training progress according to students' own abilities and conditions. Therefore, students study ahead of schedule to be able to shorten training time. Normally, the training period is 4 years so students can completed in 3.5 years or 3 years. Shortening the training time of students not only saves time and costs for students and their families but also creates many opportunities for employment and future life. At the same time, the school and the association can also reduce many training costs and other costs if students shorten their training time. However, in reality, shortening the time spent in credit-training system is not simple. In training under the credit system, each student has a different learning plan. There is a likelihood that students have overlapping schedules between some courses, so it is mandatory to reduce the number of courses or adjust the study plan to study other subjects. This can also make it difficult for students to shorten the digging time. On the other hand, organizing practical internships outside of school is very difficult to standardize, ie., it is difficult to rely on the student's registration, but usually must follow the school's plan (year-based training style). For example, students majoring in pedagogy are organized to do pedagogical internship in 2 credits in a course (in the 2nd semester of the third year and fourth year). Therefore, it may happen that students have completed physics modules theory but had to wait to do pedagogical internship so they could not graduate early.

**Table 2: Students' opinions on the limitations of training according to credit**

Unit: %

Criteria \ Level	The operating organization is very complex	many unusual situations	knowledge is divided	difficult to organize activities	Difficult to reschedule or make up time	It takes a long time for procedures
Very low	3.2	1.8	5.8	3.2	4.0	1.8
Low	19.6	11.0	23.2	13.0	6.4	9.4
Medium	36.8	31.0	33.0	18.6	27.1	28.5
High	27.0	37.6	28.2	39.9	36.3	34.3
Very high	13.4	18.6	9.8	25.3	26.1	26.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Direct survey data in 2020

An interesting feature is the management and administration work in academic training credit mechanism is very complicated. As mentioned above, in year-based training, students learn one at a time. The general plan follow to the school's arrangement so the operation is very simple and easy. In training under the credit system, each student has a separate learning plan, so the organization and management of training is extremely complicated. Students have to lose a lot time to enter study plans, register for courses, adjust plans and additional registration. A limitation is also raised in training under the credit system, which is that most of the modules in the credit system are relatively small, so there is not enough time to present truly complete and systematic knowledge, thereby making an impression of overwhelming. This is actually a drawback, and people often fix this disadvantage by not designing modules that are too small.

Finally, people often design subjects or organize comprehensive exams so that students have the opportunity to connect and synthesize the knowledge they have learned. A notable feature is that training under the credit system is difficult to create internal cohesion among students of a specialized class, because each student studies according to a separate schedule. Therefore, the class sections will be very loose and students change frequently between modules, specialized class activities and group activities should be organized face many difficulties. To overcome this difficulty, one must organize group activities which are more flexible, use confirmation sheets to calculate points when assigning types of group members in branches. In addition, the school must spend some sessions decided not to arrange a study schedule so that students could participate in school activities and class activities according to the course (classes according to the course were established in 2020).

On the basis of promoting the positive awareness of learners, training according to the given standards that allows students to reduce class time and increase self-study and research time. In principle, corresponding to 1 hour of class, students must have at least 2 hours preparation for each credit, and students must spend about 30 hours of self-study. Thus, if in yearly training, lecturers have responsibilities to take the task of imparting knowledge while students are completely passive in absorbing knowledge from the teacher, then in credit-training system, the teacher is mainly the instructor and the team organizers for learners to self-reliantly participate in cognitive activities and grasp knowledge for themselves. This shows the key issue to improve quality in training.

According to the credit system, we must innovate teaching and learning methods on both sides: the teacher and the learner. If teaching and learning methods do not change, there may be a risk that training under the credit system has poorer quality than training under the year-based system because the class time in credit training is less. However, the reality has been confirmed that the credit system should still be conducted along with many advantages.

In this era of information explosion, knowledge will quickly become out-of-date. If students just stop at absorbing knowledge from teacher, they will soon be completely passive in the face of changes in knowledge of the times and will not have the ability to self-develop. Thus, the main task of the university is not only about providing knowledge but about equipping students with learning methods and research methods. This is a fundamental change in approach teaching and learning styles that training under the credit system should aim for.

By reducing class time and increasing self-study time, students will have time more for themselves. This is an opportunity for students to study two majors in parallel, learn foreign languages, computer science or work part-time to fund their studies and make ends meet.

However, this characteristic can also lead to the fact that students will not use their time well outside class, and experience poor learning quality.

**Table 3: Students' opinions on the necessary time for self-study corresponding to 1 hour of class**

Unit: %

Self-study time	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours or more	Total
Students' opinion	8.8	45.9	29.8	11.5	4.0	100.0

Based on our survey on students' self-study time corresponding to 1 hour of class time, the number of opinions suggesting the need for 2 hours of self-study is the highest proportion, reaching only 45.9%. If we also consider opinions suggesting the need for self-study time of 2 hours or more, the proportion reaches 91.2%. Therefore, the majority of student opinions are in line with the regulations mentioned above. However, in terms of the actual time students spend on self-study each day, it does not strictly adhere to the principle mentioned above. The percentage of students using time for self-study over 6

hours per day is 0.2%; from 5-6 hours per day is 5.5%; from 4-5 hours per day is 12.6%; from 3-4 hours per day is 48.0%; from 1-2 hours per day is 30.0%; and less than 1 hour per day is 3.8%. According to our assessment, currently, on average, students only have 2-3 class periods per day. Therefore, according to the principle, students should self-study for 4-6 hours per day. However, according to the survey results, only 18.3% of students use 4-6 hours per day for self-study.

Regarding the place of self-study for students, the majority of opinions suggest that the appropriate places for self-study are at home or in dormitories, or in student accommodations (91.1%). Additionally, some other places chosen for self-study by students include lecture halls or school classrooms (80.5%); at the library (84.0%); at bookstores, computer rooms, or friends' houses (70.0%). Other less chosen places include parks (33.0%); at internet cafes (39.6%).

We all know that to improve the quality of education under the credit system, it is necessary to enhance the students' active participation. However, the majority of students still remain passive in their studies. Many students appear confused when it comes to planning their study schedules and registering for courses. According to our survey, the situation where students do not grasp the procedures and regulations in credit-based education can be categorized into five levels: very low level 1.3%; low level 4.6%; moderate level 27.3%; high level 47.0%; very high level 19.8%. This means that 94.1% of students do not fully understand the procedures and regulations in credit-based education, ranging from moderate to very high levels. This situation highlights the need to raise awareness and enhance counseling for students through academic advisors.

Training under the credit system can be likened to a "market economy" while training under the yearly system is akin to a "planned economy". The strengths of the credit system training are evident, but operating the mechanism is not straightforward. Unlike in the yearly system where plans are implemented uniformly and tightly, in the credit system training, institutions must adapt to the "strategies, tactics" of each student. In our view, if the credit-based education system operates entirely according to students' demands, two significant difficulties will arise: 1) Institutions may lack the resources to meet all student demands (for example, classroom space, teaching staff, time allocation...); 2) Students still face many limitations in planning their studies effectively for themselves (despite guidance from academic advisors). These difficulties will lead to ineffective planning by students or passive adjustments when institutions cannot meet their needs. Based on these realities, we propose some solutions as follows:

### ***3.1 Combining the advantages of credit-based education with the advantages of yearly system education***

According to us, it is possible to apply the model of "State-oriented market economy development" in credit-based education, tentatively referred to as "Leveraging the positive orientation of students guided by the institution". This means that institutions need to establish a reasonable framework for students to choose within when planning their studies, without entirely leaving it to the "whim" of students. Specifically, we believe that each academic discipline should design a few "framework plans" as suggestive guidelines for students to refer to when planning their studies. These framework plans should include options such as studying according to schedule, accelerating the pace, or lagging behind the schedule, for students to consider and choose from.

### ***3.2 Enhancing information provision for students to actively plan their studies***

Currently, students often have very little information, especially regarding the study plans of other students in the same field of study. Therefore, there may be situations where some students choose course A while others choose course B, resulting in a "disorder" in study plans that the institution cannot accommodate. So why not provide information to students about how many students are choosing course A or course B in a given semester? Similar to stock market information, information about students' study plans by field of study will help students actively adjust their study plans more rationally and feasibly. The institution will then have fewer special cases to consider.

### ***3.3 Innovating the perspectives and teaching methods of lecturers***

Implementing credit-based education is only effective when lecturers change their perspectives and teaching methods. Of course, this does not mean that yearly system education does not require innovation in teaching methods, but the demand placed on credit-based education is urgent. If credit-based education continues with lecturers heavily focused on providing information, lightly guiding and organizing for self-awareness of learners, the quality of education will be inferior to yearly system education. This is because credit-based education has reduced the number of class hours for lecturers. Currently, many lecturers are struggling with the required shift to learner-centered teaching methods, which is a mandatory requirement in credit-based education.

Lecturer Vu Dinh Bay from Hue University points out the difficulties faced by many lecturers, such as sticking to old habits with traditional teaching methods, not approaching positive teaching methods suitable for the characteristics of each subject, and some relying too heavily on modern teaching tools but failing to achieve substantial teaching effectiveness [Vu Dinh Bay, 2010, p. 74].

Dr. Tran Van Dung from Tay Nguyen University also mentioned that the university has been implementing credit-based education since 2009 but faced obstacles as students are not accustomed to working independently. They still rely on the guidance of academic advisors and class officers to obtain information from the university. Consequently, many students complain about not knowing which courses are offered and what the study plans entail. According to investigations at some universities, the level of student autonomy in the learning process is very low [Tran Van Dung, 2010, p.123].

We believe that the pressing issue is to focus on training, workshops, and providing information to the teaching staff. If lecturers do not fully understand credit-based education, there cannot be fundamental changes in the quality of education. Only when educators have a proper understanding of credit-based education can they proactively adjust their teaching methods to be suitable and effective for this system.

### 3.4 Changing students' mindset and study habits

In a study on the current situation of credit-based learning at Hanoi University of Education by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Cong Khanh, over 54% of students surveyed stated they lack interest in learning, and 64% claimed they have not found suitable learning methods... [Cited in Vu Dinh Bay, 2010, p.73].

Our survey also indicates that currently, students allocate little time for self-study, and they still have the habit of only studying what the teacher teaches.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Thanh Ai from Can Tho University stated: "Credit-based education requires students to have self-learning and research skills, yet the habit of passive learning and relying solely on textbooks or materials provided by teachers formed during secondary education has led many students to encounter difficulties or feel directionless. Many students use their self-study time for personal activities such as part-time jobs or pursuing a second degree..." [Tran Thanh Ai, 2010, p.48].

To change students' study habits, the role of the teacher is crucial. In fact, teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. We believe that teachers must innovate themselves first. Using a football analogy, whereas teachers previously played the role of "players" on the field, they must now transition into the role of "coaches" for the team. The main task of university lecturers is not to transmit knowledge but to guide and organize students to seek knowledge and develop their intellect independently. Teachers must assign self-study tasks (homework) to students and assess the results of their self-study. This means creating a connection between classroom teaching and self-study at home. We need to introduce a new learning style to students: teachers recommend books and set requirements, and students must find and study those books themselves. Even during the training process at the university, students must harness their internal strength to develop self-learning and research abilities. Only in this way can the knowledge acquired by students be progressive, adaptable to changes, and in line with the rapid development of the era. This is also the goal of credit-based education.

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## 4. Conclusion

While credit-based education is considered a new training method, it has a history spanning hundreds of years and has established its advantages in many prestigious universities worldwide. For universities in Vietnam, credit-based education is still relatively new. Moreover, there are still many limitations in resources for ensuring credit-based education. Therefore, its implementation faces numerous difficulties and obstacles.

In the credit-based education method, along with organizing training management in a flexible and individualized manner based on the study plans of learners, the appropriate application of positive teaching methods and empowering learners with autonomy is essential to ensure the success of this new training method.

Based on the survey results of students' opinions on credit-based education in general and especially the proposed solutions to enhance students' autonomy, we hope to contribute to improving the quality of education at Can Tho University as well as at universities nationwide. This will gradually bring our higher education system closer to the global higher education standards.

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