SELF-STUDY REALITY OF STUDENTS AT VINH LONG UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Self-study is identified as a core competency that needs to be formed and developed by students in the new general curriculum to develop learners' competencies. Meanwhile, effective self-study is a big problem that students are facing. This article refers to the findings of our recent research. The survey was carried out to find out the reality of self-study and the factors affecting 350 students from different faculties at the Vinh Long University of Technology Education.

Keywords: Self-study, student, Vinh Long University of Technology Education, Vietnam

Introduction

The training method under the credit system is essential to promote the activeness of learners, including self-study as a determining factor in the academic achievement of university students. In addition, the reform of the general curriculum in our country emphasizes developing self-study competency in students, in which learners self-organize and effectively manage their learning activities while teachers play the role of support. This poses a very clear requirement for teacher training because self-study is one of the basic elements of the teaching profession [2, 3], and this will be an important content that pedagogy students need to be trained and develop to meet future careers. Self-study is an internal material condition for students to turn self-study motivation into concrete results, to make them confident in themselves, to develop interest and maintain positive awareness, and to practice the quality and behavior of researchers to contribute to scientifically solving problems posed by social and professional practice [9].

The importance of the problem has attracted attention from education researchers recently to clarify the aspects that need to be overcome in reality as well as the factors affecting the self-study of students [1,5,6,8,10]. Accordingly, the evaluation results of the lecturers show that students have the most difficulty in finding and researching learning materials, in using effective self-study methods such as participating in scientific research, and in average physical time spent on self-study at home, of which common period is from 1 to less than 2 hours (36.9%), and from 2 to less than under 3 hours (18.9%); while the remaining 64/214 (29.9%) students spend less than 1 hour studying at home and only 4.2% of students spend more than 4 hours on self-study every day [8]. Students also rated the lowest in the skill of psychological preparation-self-learning motivation, skills of preparation of means/conditions for self-study, and development of a scientific rest and study regime. The above research also pointed out some basic requirements of ineffective self-study such as lack of a positive learning

environment, none of the guidance on self-study skills, and lack of necessary conditions for self-study such as materials, study places, etc. Especially most of the students in the research sample expressed their desire to be guided on effective study skills.

As for students of the Vinh Long University of Technology Education, to find effective ways to guide students to self-study, understanding the self-study reality of students is essential, especially when approaching the problem research in a new way which is the psychological approach. Accordingly, self-study is a psychological-cognitive activity; therefore, for such activity to be effective, learners must know how to apply psychological factors to the self-study process. The obtained results shall be a good suggestion for the research team to develop training scopes for students of the Vinh Long University of Technology Education on effective self-study skills.

Scope of Research
Some basic concepts

a) The concept of Self-study has broad and narrow meanings. In this study, self-study is understood in a narrow sense, according to which, self-study is the process by which learners solve learning tasks at the request of lecturers outside of classroom hours, or the process by which learners voluntarily and independently solve effectively the learning tasks assigned by the lecturers. According to this understanding, self-study is considered a stage or phase of the learning process [4,7].

To thoroughly understand the essence of self-study activities, it is necessary to start by understanding the essence of learning activities. In foreign documents, the understanding of "self-study" is always analyzed as the concept of "learning". Accordingly, "learning" following the school method is a form of cognitive activity, a form of mental and psychological activity, aiming at acquiring social-historical experiences in general, and knowledge, skills, and high technique in particular, and preparing students to become real subjects of labor activities. It is driven by the self-conscious aim of acquiring new knowledge, skills, high techniques, methods of acquiring such knowledge, forms of behavior, and certain types of activities, and values. Such particular activity has a basic and direct purpose of "learning" and of intentional learning. Thus, this activity is only possible in case people reach the point where they can adjust their actions to a conscious purpose (about 5-6 years old). The essence of learning is an actively, independently, creatively cognitive process, aimed at changing the subject itself through changing the object of activities. Motivators for learning are those that arise from individual needs, in which, the most significant are the motivations associated with satisfaction of cognitive needs as well as with the application of knowledge to solve certain practical purposes [1,5,6,7].

According to the above understanding, self-study is a psychological activity, so in order to learn effectively, learners must know how to apply psychological factors to the learning process. On this point, Prof. Nguyen Canh Toan mentioned most fully when he said that self-study was the time when the individual mobilized its entire personality into learning [9]. As a psychological activity, self-study always has a definite object conducted by the subject (each student has to make his own brain work), operated on the principle of indirection through technical tools (technical knowledge, machines, technological skills) and psychological tools (voice, words, numbers, symbols, images, etc.); has a definite purpose; has a socio-historical

essence (operated in social relations); has the physical basis of the brain and the brain's high-level neural activity (consumption of nerve energy, the process of mobilizing functions of the brain, of the senses, etc.); and has high interaction (implemented in diverse and rich person-to-person relationships) [7].

b) The concept of students at Pedagogical Universities is understood as those who are studying at Pedagogical Universities. Those are the people who study and practice in their pedagogical professions and practices to become future teachers [1], [6].

c) The concept of self-study activities of students at the University of Technology Education is understood as the process by which each individual student self-consciously, independently performs a sequence of consecutive actions, starting from determining the purpose of self-study to planning, organizing the implementation of self-study plans, self-checking and evaluating self-study results to draw experience, adjusting self-study to effectively solve its own learning tasks. The self-study activities of students at the Pedagogical Universities have the following basic characteristics: showing the completely active and voluntary role of learners; having clear goals and plans; having diverse content; taking place in different environments, rich contexts; using diverse methods and means; results being assessed through the performance of specific learning tasks.

At the university level, self-study is considered as a bridge between learning and scientific research, because the learning process of students at universities is essentially a cognitive research process [1,5 ,6,9]. During the learning process, each student has to master the system of knowledge and skills on its own, master the foundations of its future career, and must have the potential to adapt to the immediate and long-term requirements set by social practices. Determining the purpose, building motivation, and choosing method and reasonable form of self-study are necessary, but in order for students' learning activities to be quality and effective, students must have knowledge and skills in self-study.

d) Efficiency

According to the Vietnamese dictionary, "Efficiency" is the relationship between the results achieved and the resources used. An activity is said to be effective when it achieves its goal with the least amount of time and resources [11]. Thereby, it can be understood that effective self-study is when the individual achieves the set learning goals without being tired, stressed and costly by financial costs.

Self-study is an internal material condition for students to turn self-study motivation into concrete results, to make them confident in themselves, to develop interest and maintain positive awareness, and to practice the quality and behavior of researchers in order to contribute to scientifically solving problems posed by social and professional practice [9]. These suggest many specific measures to improve students' self-study ability, such as: Integrating into training curricula; developing a positive learning environment; organizing student to perform scientific research; innovating the assessment of learning and training results; self-studying through mistakes, etc. Similarly, other forms of fostering to improve self-study skills for students are also proposed: Integrating self-study fostering contents into the course teaching process of lecturers; attracting students to participate in the scientific research of lecturers; being included in the orientation course instruction for newcomer students.

Results of research

Methods, objects, scopes of research

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- Research methods used: documents and written research; written investigation; active product research; in-depth interviews; mathematical statistics.

- Research objects: 250 1st and 2nd year students from faculties of the University and 25 lecturers of the University.

- Scope of research: (a) Students' perception of the role of self-study; (b) Actual situation of some basic self-study skills of students.

Results from practical research

a) Results on the reality of students' perception of the role of self-study at Vinh Long University of Technology and Education

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

NO.	Level	First year (N=200)		Second year (N=100)	
		Quantity	(%)	Quantity	(%)
1	Very important	17	8.5	13	13.0
2	Important	130	65.0	76	76.0
3	Not important	53	26.5	11	11.0

According to analysis, the results of Table 1 show that the majority of students are well aware of the importance of self-study although there is a difference between the opinions of the 1st and 2nd year students. Furthermore, most of the respondents were aware of the period when the demand for self-study appears in them, but the results in Table 2 show that this awareness is not well expressed in self-study practice. Even if the demand for awareness appears, it is not enough to convert self-study achievements in a large number of students. This is also considered as one of the biggest difficulties of students, which is creating self-motivation for self-study.

Table 2. Students' opinions on the period when the demand for self-study appears (N=250)

The period when the demand for self-study appears	Quantity	%
When needing to solve a specific exercise	185	74.0
When encountering unknown content that needs to be known	163	65.2
When wishing to deepen their understanding of a known learning content	198	79.2
When hearing different opinions on an issue	171	68.4
When entertaining, travelling, etc.	190	76.0
When being considered ignorant about a certain issue	210	84.0
When being disgruntled with a comment on an issue	183	73.2
When needing to find part-time job	167	66.8
When achieving a certain learning goal	159	63.6

Meanwhile, students realize that they have demand for self-study guidance from lecturers when:

- Realizing that they have a gap in their knowledge base (58,8%);
- Realizing that their self-study is not effective (79.6%);

- Realizing that they lack confidence when using information in learning (70,1%).

b) Results on the reality of self-study planning and self-study time management

Table 3. Reality of students' self-study planning

NO.	Type of plan	Level					
		Yes		*Intermittent*		*No*	
		Quantity	*%*	*Quantity*	*%*	*Quantity*	*%*
1	By academic year	52	20.8	90	36.0	108.0	43.2
2	By semester	111	44.4	104	41.6	35.0	14.0
3	By month	122	48.8	108	43.2	20.0	8.0
4	By week	115	46.0	120	48.0	15.0	6.0
5	By subject	167	66.8	71	28.4	12.0	4.8

The research results of students show that currently, almost students are not interested in making study plans, especially long-term study plans. Up to 43.2% of students believe that "plan by academic year" is not important. They are often interested in making study plans by semester and by month or by subject, but it only focus on a small number of good students. This reflects students' awareness of the role of learning planning in terms of credit-based training. Meanwhile, it also shows the lack of initiative in self-study activities, reflected in the management and arrangement of self-study time effectively. Moreover, in terms of form, most students do not know how to develop a plan in the true sense that reflects the set goals and the feasibility of implementation. The plans, if any, are monotonous and lack motivation because students do not know how to apply psychological factors to develop, so they are not effective. This result suggests to develop training content for students on effective self-study planning skills.

In the question "Please list the three things you regret most for not being able to do during the last school break", the answers obtained from students were sorted by order from highest to lowest as follows (most response shall be ranked 1st):

- Learning results are not as expected (scores are lower than expected);
- Not being able to do some of the things they plan to do because they can't find the time (learn English, learn computer science, learn some life skills);
- Not being able to help parents/relatives in some household tasks because of not being able to arrange time;
- Not being able to see friends, attend some meetings with high school friends or socialize with some other university friends in the city because of being busy to study at that time;
- Having many social news that cannot be updated because of being no time to read books, etc.;
- Being not interested in helping younger brother in studies because of being too busy with its own work;
- Sometimes neglecting to take care of themselves because of being always busy with study and other work.

The main reason listed by the students was that they wasted time in different ways, such as: Sleeping, "boiling telephone porridge", "talking" with friends, hanging out, going online (reading newspapers, chatting), playing sports (playing badminton, chess), going to the cinema.

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When students were requested to list the two behaviors that they personally feel most need to change, the responses of most students are:

- The first behavior they want to change: have a clear study plan for themselves, especially setting learning goals. For a long time now, they often study in the style of "play it by ear" as a general plan without a clear goal. For example, they don't think about how a certain subject is related to their future career;

- The second behavior they want to change: when they have decided to do something related to professional learning, they must actively arrange their time to try to do it. For a long time, there is a habit of procrastinating, or making excuses because there is no time, so it often "cloak to make when it begins to rain". Therefore, it is often criticized by lecturers about the progress of the task (the assignment is often not prepared as the lecturers expect).

When students were asked "How have you studied since entering university?", the responses of the majority of students in the research are:

- There is a goal for the subject, for example, trying to get a good score or better, but not setting a specific plan to do it. Goals are set in mind, not written down;

- Study according to the weekly schedule. Just study in turn subjects or assigned tasks by lecturers (homework) without a self-study plan;

- Only really study when the exam comes, so it's often very busy, often having to stay up at night, being very stressful, and directly affecting their health. After the exam, they often lose weight; their face is haggard; sometimes the results are not as expected, and even some subjects have to be re-learned. This clearly shows the ineffectiveness of self-study activities of students.

Table 4 is the students' opinions about spending daily material time for self-study.

This result suggests for developing content to foster students' effective time management skills, overcoming procrastination in self-study activities.

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

Self-study time	Performance level (N=250)	
	Quantity	(%)
Over 6 hours/day	6	2.4
5-6 hours/day	4	1.6
3-4 hours/day	10	4.0
1-2 hours/day	152	60.8
Do not know/ Do not care	78	31.2

c) *The reality of content development and use of self-study methods by students*

Table 5. Development of self-study content of students

NO.	Contents	Quantity	(%)
1	Following the order of lessons in class	150	60.0
2	Following the question in the textbook	80	32.0
3	According to the content of study, exam	240	96.0
4	Following the direction of the lecturers	245	98.0
5	Following personal preference	87	34.8

Self-study content includes all learning tasks done by individuals and can be conducted by students outside of regular school hours. It can be said that the student's self-study workload is very large, and the essence of activities is diverse. Students spend a lot of time studying. Therefore, in the student's timetable, many difficulties arise when resolving many conflicts between: Class time and self-study time; time for self-study and time for other activities (entertainment, sports, culture - society); requirements on workload and requirements on work quality; requirements on learning with physical health; requirements on learning with necessary conditions. Therefore, having a scientific self-study plan and a reasonable timetable will bring efficiency and quality for self-study and self-research as desired.

Through the above data table, the level of self-study content development of students is still limited, lack of initiative and self-discipline because it is based on the imposition from the lecturer or the exam program. When being asked for reasons, some students said that it was because they were not taught how to develop self-study content. Lecturers mainly complete the teaching work in class. Sometimes the lecturers assign homework, but then does not check the results of the students' homework.

Table 6. Students' opinions on using self-study method

Self-study method	Order of importance (%)		
	Important	*Less important*	*Not important*
Through error	24	56.0	20
Through scientific research	19.3	12.7	68
Through teamwork/teaching each other	65.2	31.6	3.2

To be able to self-study well, self-study method is a leading important factor. Having a good learning method will be the foundation to help learners organize their self-study activities most effectively. After statistics and analysis of the obtained data, it can be seen that students self-assess (Table 6).

In a more detailed analysis, students' specific expressions when studying learning materials are quite diverse, including:
- Learn notebooks by heart;
- Read textbooks and materials related to the lesson before class;
- Read textbooks and reference materials after class;
- Read materials according to the instructions and requirements of the lecturers;
- Actively explore materials related to the learning content;
- Make their own outline after each class, and after each lesson;
- Actively discuss in teams or groups;
- Exchange questions with friends or lecturers;
- Actively apply theory to solving exercises, practice, and work practice;
- Learn according to personal preferences.

In general, the self-study of students at Vinh Long University of Technology Education (in the research) is still highly dependent on information provided by lecturers. Reading textbooks, reference materials, and actively searching for materials related to the subject

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content is not much among students, and it often concentrates in excellent students. Group discussion activities have also been conducted, but not much. Reading materials before class is an extremely important and necessary task because it helps students to understand the lesson more easily and absorb the knowledge of the lecturers faster, but this activity has not been accepted by the students yet. Going into reading skills, taking notes, and keeping study materials also have many issues to keep in mind. For example, reading is a psychological activity, governed by a number of psychophysiological functions; however, students do not know how to apply psychological factors to effectively organize this activity, so it is very inefficient: wasting time, not remembering, and not understanding the information they have read. Or, students have habits that hinder effective reading of the material. This will also be a content that needs to be fostered for them.

Conclusion

Students at Vinh Long University of Technology Education in the research had a correct awareness of the importance of self-study, the demand for being fostered to develop effective self-study skills;

A part of students in the research has organized self-study activities as a continuation of classroom learning. However, some self-study skills implemented by students are not really effective because they still lack knowledge about the psychophysiological basis of learning in general and self-study in particular.

The results of the reality survey suggest that the research team propose some content to improve self-study efficiency for students at Vinh Long University of Technology Education with a psychological approach to self-study activities.

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