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Self- directed learning in the context of internationalization in TVET in Vietnam

Abstract

This article focuses on self-directed learning for students. Nowadays, the rapid development of science and engineering, the explosion of information technology, emerging knowledge, technological and technical creations as well as the expansion of professions make self-directed learning an imperative skill for today's students.

Promoting self-directed learning allows educators to cope with the battle between time for teaching and studying and the large amount of knowledge needed to provide to students. Self-directed learning is a learner-driven learning process that is determined by the needs, interests, and learning conditions of the individual. In addition, the self-directed learner actively identifies goals, implements plans, and evaluates learning outcomes. To satisfy the demand of training human resource for the industrial and modern workforce, trainers need adequate teaching content, teaching methods, studying methods, examination methods, reviewing methods and so on. The research for this problem aims to help educators satisfy student motivation for finding and analysing knowledge. Self-directed learning is a teaching method that focuses on leaners and makes them active, independent, self-confident and goal orientated participants. Self-directed learning also helps educators obtain the goals and missions of schools and improves positivity and training quality in universities in the context of international integration.

Key words: *Self-directed learning, enhancing training quality, international integration*

1   Introduction

A key factor in the development of the country is the demand of interaction and cooperation with other countries in regard to their culture and economy. In the context of economic integration, education and training are considered at the top of national policy. Accordingly, the government signed and issued the Resolution in the 8th Conference hold by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam XI (Resolution No29 - NQ/TW) 'The comprehensive education and training reform meets the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the condition of socialist-oriented market economy and international integration' (Thai Duy Tuyen 2001, 5).

In order to respond to the requirements of national development in regard to national integration, the challenge of providing high quality training in human resource for the nation is paramount. The overall training process as well as individual student learning activities has always been considered an important factor for ensuring the quality of training human

resources at the university level. Learning activities are organized according to positive models such as the self-directed learning model, a learning method in which learners self-determine learning objectives and outline plans for studying and researching in education and training. It is important to determine appropriate objectives to enhance training quality and apply the most advanced learning methods such as active teaching methods in order to gain the sustainable development of learning methods that improve student positivity and activeness. Self-directed learning is a process in which learners positively (with or without the help of others) assess learning needs, set learning goals, identify learning resources, select the appropriate learning strategies, and review learning outcomes (Pham Trong Luan 1995).

In teaching practice, if students can self-direct their learning methods, they will actively participate in lectures and activities, experience knowledge acquisition, obtain better academic results, and discover more job opportunities.

Education quality is improved if and only if the learner's creativity in learning is enhanced and if the education process is transferred to the self-education process. Research in regard to educational processes support this point: 'Methods of higher education are required to appreciate fostering for self-study ability, facilitate learners to develop creative thinking and practical skills, participate in research, experimentation and application' (Nguyen Thi Cam Van 2014, 57). Thus, teaching and learning methods in the universities should follow three orientations:

- Fostering self-study ability
- Facilitating learners to develop creative thinking
- Practicing skills and participating in research and application (Dang Vu Hoat 1994).

2 Research methodology

2.1 Features of self-directed learning

Nowadays, to implement innovative teaching methods that reflect on the full range of features, it is important for teachers to inherit and promote the positive aspects of traditional methods (representation, conversation, visual method…) as well as apply positive and modern teaching trends. Positive teaching methods teach in the direction of promoting positive, active, and creative learners, whereas passive teaching methods create many illusions. These methods are distinguished based on four specific features:

+ Teaching through student activities

+ Focusing on practice self-learning methods

+ Reinforcing individual learning as well as cooperative learning

+ Combining teacher assessment with student self-assessment

Self-directed learning is a learning method requiring learners to self-study or self-master knowledge. When learners initially access self-directed learning methods, they are often confused; however, diffidence becomes motivation, fostering the mind to overcome 'diffidence', which makes learners more competent and capable. Self-directed learning is essential learning. The organization of learning activities that are reasonable, scientific, and efficient are the responsibility of not only students but also trainers and contribute to improving the quality of education (Nguyen Thi Cam Van 2014, 62).

2.2   Enhancing learners' abilities

Enhancing learners' ability through self-directed learning activities focusing on enhancing creative thinking is the important mission of university education and the goal toward innovative teaching and learning methods in the education and training field. To promote learners' maximum self-learning and self-study capabilities, teachers must always focus on a student learning and find ways for students to self-master knowledge and apply theory in practice.

2.3   Context of international integration

On one hand, new requirements for education have been set in the context of socioeconomic developments of nations internationally. Vietnam has been in a period of socioeconomic industrialization. Vietnam joined the WTO (World Trade Organization) on November 15th, 2006 (and became an official member on January 11th 2007), participating actively and directly in globalization and international integration. Globalization and the requirements of a knowledge-based economy and a knowledge-based society have direct effects on the economy, the society, and the Vietnam labour market.

In terms of education, globalization sets opportunities and challenges. It creates opportunities to expand services and international investment in education and creates opportunities to enhance the exchange of experience and scientific education as well as international collaboration in education and training.

Despite being controversial, educational services have become services in international exchanges, creating challenges for education and training, particularly in education management issues such as education sovereignty, goal management, quality of education, and the education economy. This refers to the following global developments and trends:

- Globalization of education creates competition in the quality of education and training between countries.
- Globalization poses new demands for workers. Education needs to train people to have the ability of meeting the new demands of society. This is the most fundamental challenge of globalization for education. The society's new requirements for workers in the conditions of globalization and the ever-changing knowledge-based society are challenges that need to be addressed (Thai Duy Tuyen 2001, 5).

The international integration of education has become a general goal in the reform process in many countries. Particularly in higher education, it is considered a motivational factor in education reform. Along with the innovation process and international integration, higher education in Vietnam needs to be renewed on the basis of maintaining the ethos of higher education in the country as well as approaching the common standard of the world. Internationalization of programs, curricula/ textbook, content, training methods, learning approaches are just some to be named.

3 Result

3.1 Training methods for self-directed learning

Unlike teacher-directed learning, self-directed learning is a learning method in which learners self-determine learning objectives and outline plans for study and research.

This method is supposed to have been started in the late of 20th century. Both Hould, author of the study for the youth's learning momentum, (1961) and Allen, author of projects for adult's learning, (1971) mentioned this. Basically, the concepts of self-directed learning methods manifest through the work of Malcom Knowles, which deals with aims such as setting learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes (1975). Dana Skiff also described similar concepts and methods of self-studying (2009). The above works contribute to building the rationale for self-directed learning in this paper. Until now, the appearance of new ideals has created many trends of self-directed learning: self-directed study, study through internet resources, and individual planed study (Tomlinson 2004, 188).

In the self-directed learning process, learners (supported by teachers) will discuss plans to offer activities and make decisions about suitable learning methods with immediate objectives and long-term goals. The purpose of a teacher is to meet the actual needs of learners. This method is appropriate for the development of learning skills such as research skills, creative skills, independent scientific research.

3.2 Model and procedure

3.2.1 Model of Ambrose and partners

Model of Ambrose and partner (1975) states that the self-directed procedure includes 5 steps as follows.

Step 1: Assess the assigned tasks

Step 2: Assess strengths and weaknesses

Step 3: Make an action plan

Step 4: Apply strategies and monitor the implementing process

Step 5: Ponder, contemplate, and adjust if necessary.

These steps are implemented in an interactive manner between students and teachers. An inner core element affecting the entire process is the student's belief in their own competencies and learning abilities. Competencies are available/present within the person and can be improved by practicing. At the same time, learning something new is not an exponential process, sometimes working quickly and other times more slowly (Knowles, 1975).

Figure 1:   Model of Ambrose and partners

This model appreciates the learner's metacognition. Metacognition is the basic and essential factor for the self-directed learner to assess task requirements, skills, and knowledge; draw a plan; monitor process; and adjust if necessary.

3.2.2   Model of Geral Grow

In 1991, in order to teach learners how to be self-directed, Geral Grow theorized four stages (Grow 1991): dependence, interest, participation, and self-direction. In addition to the above diagram, Grow also offered an analysis of the process of the role of teacher and learners as follows:
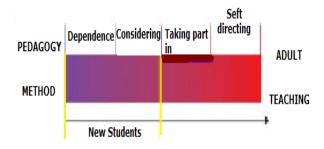

Figure 2:   Geral Grow's shift stage model

- *Dependence:* Teachers serve professionals, provide all information in lectures, train, and give immediate feedback to students.
- *Interest:* Teachers act as facilitators. They lecture to inspire learners and discussion with guidance.
- *Participation:* Teachers serve as the instructors.
- *Lectures are guided by discussion* whereby the teacher and the students participate equally.
- *Self-Direction:* Although teachers are the authorized experts, the learners are self-practicing—writing essays, doing assignments, and setting the direction of the course by themselves.

The advantage of this model is its ability to show the stages students often have to undergo in order to become self-directed learners; however, there are some shortcomings. The first shortcoming in this model is that Grow believed that "freshers" (new learners) do not have self-oriented abilities, the ability to engage in discussions and concrete work, i.e. no experience in self-orientated learning. The second shortcoming is that the Grow model excludes metacognitive skills of students. We can assume that by this model, students who miss the opportunity to practice metacognitive skills in the early days of entering college skip these steps and adjust accordingly.

4   Discussion

The modern teaching methods in higher education today are implemented following certain trends: positive enhancement of cognitive processes, concretization, and technological teaching methodologies. This method not only requires teachers to convey knowledge to students but also to teach students creative ways to gain new knowledge. The teacher is not only providing information but is also applying technology and modern methods to actively support students in self-directed learning through the research of books, documents, the internet, and the real world. Teachers act as counsellors.

Moreover, according to the UNESCO documents, a modern university must meet ten criteria:
1. A highly qualified training centre
2. A centre including students capable of high intellectual development
3. An active community dedicated to concentration and creativity in scientific research
4. A centre for active and lifelong learning
5. A centre undergoing cultural renovation/update
6. A high quality and efficient centre connected with training, research, and scientific services
7. A centre that solves scientific issues specific to the region and the world
8. A centre for consulting modern science and technology
9. A community to actively participate in building a peaceful culture
10. The ability to adapt to the lifestyles of each age (Nguyen Thi Cam Van, 2014, 59).

Therefore, we need to find solutions for improving teaching methods following modern trends in order to enhance the quality and efficiency of education and training at universities.

4.1 Skills of Self-Directed Learning System (SDLS)

SDLS skills are abilities to operate a system including acts of self-organization and self-control with self-directed activities on the basis of applying the experience related to these operations. According to the SDLS models, the researchers split SDL skills in many different ways, e.g. the learning models of Ambrose and partners or the Geral Grow model. Referring to the Department of Psychology at the Education of Hanoi Pedagogical University in Vietnam, self-learning skills can be classified into four groups: orientation skills; design skills (planning); performance skills; and inspection, assessment, and review skills (Pham Trong Luan 1995). Vu Trong Ry defines the self-learning skills of pupils in general and students in particular as being distinguished by four groups: cognitive skills, practice skills, organizational skills, and assessment skills (Vu Trong Ry 1994).

Collaborating with teaching experience and the conditions of education development in Vietnam, the author divided SDLS operations into basic skill groups as follows (Vu Trong Ry, 1994):

4.1.1 Learning planning skills

This is the capability of the subject (student) who can perform an action or series of actions skilfully based on knowledge (or experience) to produce expected results. To operate SDLS successfully, students need to establish a basic plan of study, which is an oriented and directed system that the subject can use to perform a certain action. It has the function to raise the student's awareness of subject, planning, checking, and adjusting action as needed.

4.1.2 Learning organization skills

When defining the objectives, contents, and methods of learning, the learner must build learning organization skills. This requires organization and implementation of a plan through a short-term plan, a long-term training program, or a plan for each subject or each part etc. It is essential that the plan must be clearly established, organized, and implemented for each stage in accordance with the conditions and circumstances of learners. Thus, learners can access and capture knowledge easily.

4.1.3 Learning plan implementation skills

To implement a created plan successfully, the learner should have the following skills:

- Accessing to information

- Applying the knowledge

- Exchanging and disseminating information

- Collecting and processing information

Applying the above four skills will help learners attain learning plan implementation skills.

4.1.4 Learning self- assessment and self-check skills

The final step of SDLS is that the leaner can self-assess their learning results, know their learning capacity, and understand what they can and cannot do in order to find methods to promote or remedy.

4.2 Promoting proactivity and positivity in students through SDLS activities

SDLS activities not only reflect the basic characteristics of active teaching methods but also require learners to express proactivity and positivity.

The following steps are helpful to effectively implement the transformation to SDLS according to modern educational criteria in education and training.

- In the process of teaching, teachers need to focus and support students in promoting the psychological functions and ability of independent thoughts. Teachers should facilitate courage by enabling students to discuss issues, present their opinions, and think about political, economic and societal issues.
- Teachers need to coordinate different teaching methods reasonably and flexibly according to each specific context.
- Teachers need to understand the regeneration processes of knowledge and teaching methods, orientating students to self-apply in the SDLS process and to study to meet the requirements of the teacher (Vu Trong Ry 1994).

4.3 SDLS for students in the context of international integration

The rapid development of a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century requires education to renew teaching content and teaching methods. The innovative teaching methods in higher education must be directed to teaching methods which enhance positivity, proactivity, and creativity in student learning processes in order to train students to become dynamic and independent in society.

The exchange of knowledge and learning between students is lacking in direction and management from agencies and organizations. As a result, the negative influence from the outside is likely to arise and spread in Vietnamese students, especially about morality and lifestyle. This is a constant challenge for educating and training students.

In our country, after nearly two decades of implementation of the "innovation" policy which has changed from a centrally planned economy to a market economy under socialist orientation, the industrialization and modernization at the beginning and during the development stages has achieved many successes. In the context of international integration,

our country has not only transitioned to a market economy but also tends to integration and globalization.

In other words, the international context of the country has created a new era, helping university education in our country turn to a new period. More than ever there is a need to innovate objectives, contents, and methods of teaching and learning in colleges. It is not always possible to consider these three factors separately. Sometimes they blend together (Thai Duy Tuyen 2001, 5).

4.4   Method of execution

4.4.1   Students need to master the knowledge of active learning methods

The determination of the learning purpose, the methods that are chosen, and the forms of rational self-learning are necessary during the learning process. But it is important that students have the necessary skills. If students want to have professional skills, they first must have the needed skills to work independently on the basis of promoting positive awareness to acquire systems of knowledge. Since knowledge is the product of work, students must regularly practice the skills of self-directed learning systems.

Thus, to ensure the quality and efficiency of learning activities, student must have the knowledge and skills of the self-directed learning system (SDLS). These skills are inner physical conditions to help students change self-learning motivation into concrete results, allowing students to feel confident in their capabilities, to cultivate and develop interest, and to maintain positive cognition in SDLS.

4.4.2   Self-directed learning process of students

It is a cycle consisting of five stages:

Stage 1: Evaluate the standards of the individual

Learners assess individual standards: knowledge, skills, learning conditions, and goal alignment, to determine the goals of the training program they pursue.
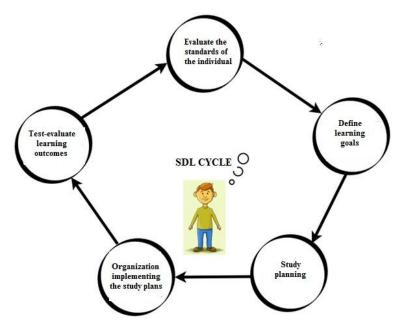
Figure 3:   Cycle of self-directed learning

Stage 2: Define learning goals

The learner determines learning objectives for content, designs curriculum based on his or her needs, and evaluates his or her standards.

Stage 3: Study planning

Learners define learning tasks.

Stage 4: Organization implementing the study plan

When determining the objectives, content, and methodology, learners must develop organizational learning skills. They must implement a plan, which may be a short-term plan, a long-term plan, or plan for each subject/part. It is necessary that the plan be clearly established for each stage, in accordance with the conditions and circumstances of the learner. Thus, learners can approach and dominate knowledge easily.

Stage 5: Test –evaluate learning outcomes

In the final step, the learner assesses his/her learning outcomes, learns his/her learning ability, understands what he/she is doing, and understands what he/she has not done so that he or she can develop or overcome. Audience achievement is also the starting point for the implementation of the next task.

4.5 Ways and methods to achieve SDLS

4.5.1 Practicing self-learning method must become a SDLS target of students

SDLS significantly helps students complete their learning mission with the quality and efficiency of the teaching-training process in schools. This work represents the fullest subjective role in the cognitive process of students. In this process, the learners are fully active and independent. They self-explore in order to acquire knowledge under the direction and control of the teacher (Pham Trong Luan 1995).

To promote their creativity and activeness, students need to practice self-learning methods, which is not only an effective method of improving the learning efficiency but also an important goal of the study. Thus, the self-learning method is actually the bridge between learning and SDLS. The self-learning method will become the core of the SDLS method.

4.5.2 What makes an effective SDLS?

The following are aspects that teachers need in order to develop SDLS skills in students:

Firstly, in order to help students have self-learning awareness, they have to get "connected" to the subject first. Therefore, teachers should raise the interest in the subject for students. The teacher can use his or her lesson to introduce the subjects in an interesting manner, highlighting the value of subjects in practice with some specific examples to stimulate learning processes.

Secondly, the teacher should guide students to create a learning plan from the beginning. Starting at the first lesson of the course, teachers do not need to teach immediately. Rather, they need to briefly introduce the program, content, learning outcomes, and learning methods so that students can build their self-study plan accordingly. Teachers have to help students understand that every plan must be based on common goals and objectives and students absolutely can strive to implement each of these objectives.

Thirdly, teachers should guide students how to find and read books or reference documents related to subjects. Teachers have to emphasize that the knowledge of a given subject does not only include the course content in teacher lectures, which comes from many different sources. Therefore, teachers should recommend valuable books or useful documents related to subjects and encourage students to self-research, self-analyse, and synthesize the knowledge. Teachers may also introduce some specialized websites or forums that promote an exchange of experiences.

Fourthly, the teacher should teach students how to take notes and listen to the lecture because these are extremely important learning skills that directly impact the learning process of students. How to listen and take notes changes from subject to subject, depending on the specific characteristics of each course and the teaching methods of each teacher.

Fifthly, the teacher should guide learning methods. The teacher should introduce and guide students to self-study according to Benjamin S. Bloom's cognitive model ladder. According to Bloom's cognitive ladder, students can learn to analyze, synthesize, and apply knowledge in each situation and review, evaluate, compare, and transfer these skills to other knowledge. This will help students learn to practice critical, abstract, and creative thinking in finding new approaches with scientific problems (Vu Trong Ry 1994).

Sixthly, the teacher should assign specific tasks for students in the next lesson. To maximize capacity and promote students to utilize self-learning time completely, the teacher should assign specific tasks for students. In this way, students can orient their tasks specifically, referring to the next learning/working step.

After having acquired former knowledge, students can build on that knowledge. When having the proper preparations at home, learning in class will become much more effective.

5   Conclusion and recommendations

Implementing self-directed learning in classrooms is not easily done. The SDLS method requires the learner to be active and self-conscious in their learning.

To achieve good learning results, students must be self-conscious and must continuously research to learn. In addition, the teacher should also have the capability of organizing and managing learning, especially when student learning takes place in many different directions in the same class. The orientation of the teacher plays a crucial role in student success. Currently, at the university, most students are passive in receiving knowledge. Learning methods, especially SDLS methods, have always been a difficult problem for many students. Therefore, every modern university should utilize SDLS methods. It is necessary for students, not only while studying at school but also when graduating, to integrate with society in the context of international integration.

Consequently, it is obvious that the demands of global integration are spreading across all sectors. A society like Vietnam's is full of fluctuations concerning employment, wages, and the remuneration and the education process. Gradually, education is changing. Teaching SDLS methods to students is the best way for student to move with a fluctuating society and such methods are the ideal for anyone who has a desire for lifelong learning.

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