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Integrating Autonomous Learning in University Teaching for Students

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Abstract:

Abstract: Autonomy not only plays an integral part in helping students gain academic success when pursuing tertiary education but also boosts the quality of education to meet high demands in society. Another important advantage of autonomy is that it can be a ground preparation to foster students' higher learning. From real social situations and educational changes, this paper summarizes some factors influencing autonomy and some ways to integrate learners' autonomy in teaching in order to help students succeed in their learning process.

Keywords: Tra Vinh University, autonomy, self-learning

1. Introduction

In the modern era, self-learning is necessary to meet the demands and conditions of society. Self-study can be easier thanks to advances in science, technology, and the wealth of Internet learning materials. With the vast amount of information available online, individuals can access resources like online courses, tutorials, and educational videos to enhance their knowledge and skills. Additionally, self-learning allows individuals to take control of their education and tailor their learning experiences to suit their specific needs and interests. Nonetheless, there are several restrictions on Tra Vinh University students' present capacity for self-learning. These restrictions may include limited access to reliable internet connections, a lack of necessary technology devices, and insufficient guidance or support from educators. Overcoming these barriers will make it crucial for students to fully embrace the benefits of self-learning and achieve academic success in today's digital age. To assist students in developing self-learning skills, this paper will examine fundamental ideas in self-learning and practical approaches to incorporating them into instruction.

2. Content

2.1. Perspectives on Self-Learning

Self-learning is commonly understood as learning without a teacher's direct guidance, involving learners independently choosing and deciding on the knowledge and skills they need and the methods and duration of learning. According to Nguyen Hien Le, self-learning is characterized by a voluntary pursuit of knowledge, with or without a teacher's presence (Le et al., 2003). This perspective aligns with Bliidi (2018), who categorizes self-learning into proactive autonomy, where learners set their learning goals and methods, and reactive autonomy, where learners respond to the teacher's guidance.

In the context of language learning, Benson and Voller (2014) identify five distinct uses of self-learning: situations where learners study independently, applying skills for self-study, innately capable learners, learning tasks, and learners' decision-making in their studies. This view highlights the versatile application of self-learning, emphasizing its role in fostering autonomy and responsibility in learners.

Comparatively, Nguyen Hien Le's (2003) emphasis on the voluntary aspect of self-learning aligns with Bliidi's (2018) concept of proactive autonomy, where learners actively engage in their educational process. However, Bliidi also introduces the idea of reactive autonomy, which contrasts with Le's definition by including the influence of external guidance. Meanwhile, Benson and Voller (2014) expand the concept further by categorizing self-learning applications, showing similarities in the recognition of learner independence but differing in their detailed categorization of self-learning scenarios.

These variations in understanding self-learning underscore the importance of recognizing different dimensions and applications of learner autonomy, contributing to a comprehensive view of self-directed education.

2.2. Factors Related to Building Self-Learning Awareness

Several factors influence the development of self-learning awareness. Boud (1988) highlights four key factors: the learner, the teacher, the learning tasks, and the environment. These factors interact to affect learning outcomes. The

teacher's role is paramount in preparing students with effective self-learning methods, introducing self-learning resources, and providing necessary support.

Blidi (2018) emphasizes that while learner initiative is crucial, sometimes external motivation, such as guidance or even compulsion, can positively impact learners by helping them overcome cultural or psychological barriers like hesitation and lack of confidence. This aligns with Boud's view that external factors, including the teacher's support, play a critical role in fostering learner autonomy.

Similarly, Stefanou et al. (2004) discuss the importance of supporting autonomy in the classroom by encouraging student decision-making and ownership, which complements Boud's emphasis on the interactive role of the environment and tasks. They assert that giving students opportunities to make choices in their learning processes enhances their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.

Furthermore, Benson (2013) highlights the significance of technology in supporting self-learning. He argues that digital tools and resources can empower students by providing diverse and accessible means for independent learning, echoing Blidi's point on the positive impact of external factors.

Comparing these perspectives, Boud focuses more on the interactive role of the environment and tasks, while Blidi highlights the importance of learner motivation and the supportive role of external forces in overcoming internal barriers. Both studies, however, agree on the significant impact of the teacher in promoting self-learning. Stefanou et al. and Benson further expand on these ideas by emphasizing student autonomy and the role of technology, respectively.

2.3. Methods to Help Students Self-Learn

Various scholars have proposed methods to aid effective self-learning. Generally, self-learning can be executed in multiple ways, requiring the right methods, appropriate materials, technology application, and personal responsibility for learning.

Boud (1988) suggests that teachers should assess students' self-learning capabilities to select suitable methods to help students acquire necessary skills or improve weak areas. He recommends leveraging all available learning opportunities, such as lectures, seminars, and interactions with knowledgeable resources. This perspective aligns with Blidi's (2018) emphasis on the teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy through structured guidance and resource provision.

Pemberton et al. (1996) stress the importance of diverse learning materials, allowing students to choose what they prefer, including both direct learning resources (self-study tasks and language practice exercises) and indirect materials (reliable written and recorded resources). This approach complements Boud's focus on varied learning opportunities by emphasizing material diversity as a crucial element of self-learning.

For English writing skills, Hyland (2000) suggests that teachers should sometimes allow students to take responsibility for their writing by deciding how to utilize feedback. This aligns with Stefanou et al.'s (2004) recommendation to give students more control over their learning process and evaluation methods.

Stefanou et al. (2004) discuss strategies to foster self-learning based on classroom organization, learning process management, and student perception. They suggest giving students autonomy in group selection, evaluation methods, and learning materials management, encouraging discussion, and providing constructive feedback to enhance knowledge. This approach highlights the importance of autonomy and personalized learning experiences, aligning with Boud's emphasis on student-centered learning environments.

Technology also plays a crucial role in promoting self-learning. Condrat (2014) advocates for the use of technology to not only enhance self-learning abilities but also to make students more responsible for their learning. Tools like emails, blogs, websites, online tests, social networks, games, and online learning communities are beneficial. This view is supported by Blidi (2018), who also recognizes the role of external resources and technology in facilitating autonomous learning.

To sum up, successful self-learning incorporates a range of techniques and tools catered to personal requirements and tastes. Researchers like Boud stress how crucial it is to evaluate and use students' talents to facilitate independent learning, and Pemberton et al. stress the significance of a variety of instructional resources. In line with the support for autonomy and customized learning environments expressed by Stefanou et al., Hyland recommends giving students more influence over the feedback process. According to Condrat and Blidi, technology facilitates self-learning by offering abundant materials and instruments that encourage responsibility. When taken as a whole, these viewpoints highlight the dynamic interaction of techniques, resources, technology, and individual accountability that is essential to creating effective self-learning experiences.

2.4. Personal Experience in Integrating Self-Learning Skills

In writing courses, the authors prepare detailed syllabi outlining self-learning and research activities. Initial surveys on students' attitudes and skills for self-learning are conducted, followed by guidance on basic self-learning skills such as effective reading, summarizing, time management, problem-solving, and information search. Students are then required to personalize their self-learning plans.

The authors often introduce websites that assist students in self-learning at home. For instance, in the Writing 4 course, students are required to write essays, and the teachers provide links to evaluation criteria, asking students to understand and summarize these criteria. Students then self-assess areas needing improvement based on these criteria. To address common challenges like vocabulary usage, the teachers recommend relevant websites and software and ask students to keep learning logs.

Additionally, the teachers encourage group work for brainstorming topics and supporting essay writing. The teaching approach focuses on creating a student-centered learning environment to foster creativity and personal development. After each writing assignment, students review common strengths and weaknesses, discuss them with peers, and revise their work accordingly.

New assessment methods, such as e-portfolios and protocol analysis, where students record their thought processes during writing, and learning blogs, where students document key learnings, have been introduced to enhance self-learning skills.

It is equally crucial to engage in self-learning exercises for pronunciation and speaking. Teachers can give students access to language learning applications that offer systematic speaking and pronunciation activities, such as Rosetta Stone, Babbel, and Duolingo. Online resources that concentrate on speaking and pronunciation, including podcasts and YouTube channels, can also be suggested. In order to improve their pronunciation, students can record themselves speaking, listen to native speakers, and use speech recognition software.

Group exercises can also be included, such as peer review sessions where students rehearse public speaking and offer helpful criticism to one another. Students' speaking and pronunciation can be further improved through language exchange programs, where they communicate with native speakers via HelloTalk or Tandem.

3. Conclusion

Integrating self-learning awareness into teaching is essential. It allows students to take ownership of their learning process and develop critical thinking skills. By fostering self-learning awareness, educators can empower students to become lifelong learners who are able to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. However, achieving good results requires the joint efforts of schools, families, and teachers to nurture and provide conditions for learners to develop this skill. This can be done by incorporating self-assessment activities, encouraging reflection, and promoting a growth mindset in the classroom. By creating a supportive environment that values self-directed learning, students will be better equipped to succeed in their academic and personal pursuits. Self-learning capability can be gradually built with patience and effort from both learners and teachers. With a clear plan, self-learning can become a habit and a culture at Tra Vinh University and beyond.

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