

AN INVESTIGATION INTO HPUNI'S ENGLISH-MAJORED SENIORS' SELF-STUDY SKILLS

Đinh Minh Thu, Tran Hai Binh

Department of Foreign Languages, HaiPhong University

Email: thudm@dhhp.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT: Self-study or self-directed learning skills are undoubtedly indispensable for students to sustain in modern times. The current article aims to investigate a university's English-majored seniors' self-study skills in a course, which greatly contributes to their success at university. To fulfill the research aim, a questionnaire was sent to over 50 English-majored seniors of class K21.1 at the Foreign Language Department at Haiphong university to collect data on five components of self-study-skills: planning skills, implementing skills, reading-and-handling-document skills, time management skills, and self-assessment-and-self-improvement skills. Research results reveal that most students perceived their self-study skills positively, especially in time management and self-assessment skills. The results can contribute to shedding light on students' self-study skills, which can raise the participants' awareness of their self-study skills, and possibly encourage relevant educators to change their actions to help students improve their self-study skills.

Keywords: English-majored seniors, HaiPhong University self-study skills

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ KỸ NĂNG TỰ HỌC CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM CUỐI CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC HẢI PHÒNG

TÓM TẮT: Kỹ năng tự học hay kỹ năng tự định hướng học tập chắc chắn là những kỹ năng không thể thiếu để người học học tập suốt đời trong thời hiện đại. Bài báo này nhằm mục đích điều tra kỹ năng tự học của sinh viên năm cuối chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại khoa Ngoại ngữ trong một khóa học. Điều này góp phần rất lớn vào sự thành công của họ ở trường đại học. Để đạt được mục tiêu nghiên cứu, một bảng câu hỏi đã được gửi đến 50 sinh viên năm cuối chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh tại lớp Ngôn ngữ Anh 1 K21, khoa Ngoại ngữ - Trường Đại học Hải Phòng để thu thập dữ liệu về năm thành tố của kỹ năng tự học:

kỹ năng lập kế hoạch, kỹ năng thực hiện, kỹ năng đọc và xử lý tài liệu, kỹ năng quản lý thời gian và kỹ năng tự đánh giá và hoàn thiện bản thân. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy hầu hết sinh viên nhận thức tích cực về kỹ năng tự học của mình, đặc biệt là kỹ năng quản lý thời gian và kỹ năng tự đánh giá. Kết quả có thể góp phần làm sáng tỏ kỹ năng tự học của học sinh, từ đó nâng cao nhận thức của người tham gia về kỹ năng tự học của mình cũng như có thể khuyến khích các nhà giáo dục có liên quan thay đổi hành động để giúp sinh viên nâng cao kỹ năng tự học của họ.

Keywords: sinh viên năm cuối chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Hải Phòng, kỹ năng tự học

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective self-study skills, or self-directed learning, are believed to form outstanding students with reasonable learning methods and lifelong study skills. In the context of credit-based training at universities and in the current VUCA¹ world, students' self-study skills become more important than ever before when they have to enact their learner autonomy more to accumulate immense knowledge. Research on self-study skills has boomed since the 80s of the last century with approximately 167 research projects (Roberson, 2006). O'Shea (2003) opines that self-study skills enable students to improve their self-confidence, autonomy, motivation and lifelong learning skills, while Spencer & Jordan (1999) hold the belief that self-study skills turn students into active participants in the learning process along with encouraging them to become deep learners. Long before that, in 1982,

Weinert affirmed that self-study must be a part of university. In Vietnam, research on self-study skills is mainly conducted on university campuses with the purpose of understanding the current status of students' self-study activities (Dinh, 2018; Do, 2016; Hang 2019; Ngo, 2020). However, there have been no studies addressing final-year students' perceptions of self-study skills for language subjects. To fill the research gap, the current study aims to investigate a university's English-majored seniors' perceptions of their self-study skills in a course. Students' perceptions are studied because they can affect and orient their learning behaviours. Research results on students' perceptions of their self-study skills can be used as indicators of and motivators for their behaviours.

The research question is formulated as:

To what extent do English-majored seniors at a university perceive their self-study skills in a language course?

¹ Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concepts of self-study skills.

Self-study skills are conceptualized variously. They can be named self-directed learning showing individual's ability to take the initiative to identify their own learning needs, their ability to determine their learning goals, their ability to define the sources they need in order to learn, their ability to choose/use appropriate learning strategies and evaluate learning outcomes with or without help from an outsider (Knowles, 1975). To simplify, Tran Thi Ha Giang (2013) defines self-study skills as the ability to carry out a system of self-organized and self-controlled self-study task by applying the experiences related to self-study tasks; the type of self-study creates the corresponding type of self-study skills. Self-study skills also can be a group of skills, in which individuals are able to take primary charge of planning, continuing and evaluating their learning experiences (Merriam et al., 2007).

2.2. Components of self-study skills

Self-study skills have been defined generally and there is a need to identify their components. Dated to 1925, Gaudig stated that self-study related to the following tasks: setting self-goals; determine the content of study process;

conduct study process based on purpose; decide solutions; conduct self-assessment; conduct self-regulation. Later, Knowles (1977) builds components of self-study skills as follows:

- The ability to enter into a close, respectful and learning-friendly relationship with learners.
- The ability to establish an environment which is physically and psychologically comfortable, open to interaction, based on cooperation, open and secure
- The ability to take responsibility for determining one's own learning needs
- The ability to set goals
- The ability to plan, implement and evaluate learning activities
- The ability to help learners to self-direct their learning
- The ability to be a facilitator and a source
- The ability to effectively use small group processes
- The ability to evaluate learning processes and outcomes

In addition, Trần Lương (2019) divides self-study skills into more specific components including planning skills, assessment skills, problem-solving skills, practical skills, social

communication skills and self-regulation skills. Little (2014) affirmed that self-study skills are demonstrated when a student creates their situation for learning by themselves from the beginning to the end of the learning process including: planning, pacing, monitoring, and evaluating.

From the above review, the current research scaffolds a theoretical framework for students' self-study skills which include five important sections: (1) planning skills, (2) implementing skills, (3) reading-and handling-document skills, (4) time management skills and (5) self-assessment skills.

2.3. Previous studies of students' self-study skills

Research on students' self-study has been conducted widely in terms of various aspects.

According to Trần Lương (2018), almost all students were aware of the necessity of self-study planning, at 92.2%; however, up to 77.5% of those students could not write a complete study plan and only stopped at writing a self-study timetable. Added to this, Đàm Thị Hải Âu and Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Hà (2021) state that up to 63.1% students having an inappropriate study plan due to their misunderstanding of the learning goal.

Only 3% of students could write their own plans and carry out learning tasks effectively. In Nguyễn Thị Lê (2022)'s research, over 50% of students participating in the survey from Vietnam University of Education were unable to follow their self-study plan. They were also weak in other sub-component skills due to the fact that few students did information exchange activities with friends and rarely asked for support from lecturers. By contrast, the students in Nguyễn Hoàng Khắc Hiếu & Huỳnh Văn Sơn (2011)'s study managed their time quite well, at 56.6%, because they knew how to estimate the amount of time needed for each study task. 54.4% of students participating in the survey had specific self-study plans, leading to these students having better time management skills. Veerasamy (2019) shows that while students' problem-solving skills had an impact of 22.2% on their academic results, most of them even encountered difficulties in this skill. Moreover, Phạm Thanh Cường (2019) stated that while reading and handling documents skills can promote students' self-study process and improve the quality of learning, only 10.6% students consulted materials outside the textbook, 31.3% voluntarily read more reference materials. To make the matter worse, 44.3% were unable to take notes,

apply documents and self-study process. Research by Lê Thị Huyền and Trịnh Quốc Lập (2011) indicates that three-quarters of the surveyed students admitted their weak self-assessment skills. Nevertheless, Huỳnh Văn Sơn (2012) points out a positive score for students' self-assessment skills at 3.52 and for their self-regulated emotional behavior skills at 3.56.

From the above reviews, students' perceptions of their own self-study skills have been showed here and here; however, no research has included all five components of self-study skills: (1) planning skill, (2) implementing skills, (3) reading-and handling-document skill, (4) time management skill and (5) self-assessment skill. Also, there seems to be hidden data on these aspects. The current study expects to fill into some gaps.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting and participants

The research was conducted at an English-majored class of K21 at the Foreign Language Department at Haiphong University. The current research invited the students in a class in terms of the convenience. The students were asked about their self-study skills in a language course they have experienced in the previous semester. Forty-nine students participated in the study.

3.2. Data collection instrument

A questionnaire survey for fourth-year English majors was conducted. The instrument was appropriate to find out the participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2002; Donyei, 2010). The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assured through the pilot with a teacher and two students to make sure of its appropriate constructs and linguistic expressions. To facilitate the reader's comprehension, both English and Vietnamese were used. In addition to the questions related to demographics, students were asked a total of twenty-seven questions about their self-study skills. These questions related to five components of self-study skills, which are planning skills (3 questions), implementing skills (8 questions), reading and handling documents skills (5 questions), time management skills (5 questions), and self-assessment skills (6 questions) (See the Appendix). The sub-skills were decided and the extent was measured on the four-scale Likert. Number 1 means weak, 2 means average, 3 means fair and 4 means good. The questionnaire was designed on Google Forms. All student information and questionnaire survey results were kept confidential and for the purposes of this study only.

3.3. Data collection procedures and analysis

The questionnaire link was sent to the to the student participants with the deadline of one week. The class has 50 students, but 49 students responded to the questionnaire and sometimes 1 or 2 of them missed some information. The collected data were analysed by SPSS 24 descriptively.

4.1. Students' planning skills

Table 1. Students' perceptions of their planning skills

		Students' skill to write the study plan	Students' skill to determine the general learning content of the course	Students' skill to determine the time bound of the course
N	Valid	48	48	48
	Missing	1	1	1
Mean		2.90	3.04	3.04
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	4
Std. Deviation		.857	.898	.944
Minimum		1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	4

The table above show three sub-components in the planning skills, including the skills to write the study plan, to determine the general contents of the course, to determine the time bound of the course. The two later skills, at 3.04 were better than the first skills, i.e. setting the learning goal. The timebound for the course seems to be clear to the students. The overall figures mean that most of the students had fair planning skills. The result is consistent with Nguyễn Hoàng Khắc Hiếu & Huỳnh Văn Sơn (2011)'s finding.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results from the survey questionnaire basing on five components of self-study skills scaffolding in the literature review, which are planning skills, implementing skills, reading and handling documents skills, time management skills, and self-assessment skills.

4.2. Implementing skills

When it comes to the students' implementing skills, eight sub-components were in concern: skill to follow study plans, skill to choose self-study methods, skill to adjust self-study methods, skill to solve problems, skill to create contents and self-study methods, skill to share and exchange information with friends, skill to ask for support from lecturers, and skill to arrange tasks appropriately.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of their implementing skills

		Students' skill to follow study plans	Students' skill to choose self-study methods	Students' skill to adjust self-study methods	Students' skill to solve problems	Students' skill to create content and self-study methods	Students' skill to share and exchange information with friends	Students' skill to ask for support from lecturers	Students' skill to arrange tasks appropriately
N	Valid	47	48	48	48	46	48	48	48
	Missing	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1
Mean		2.94	3.02	2.98	2.94	2.87	3.15	2.81	2.83
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3
Std. Deviation		1.009	.838	.911	.909	.934	.799	.982	.859
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Among all the collected data, skill to share and exchange information with friends and skill to choose self-study methods were reported more positively than the others with a mean of 3.15 and 3.02 respectively, at a fair level. It can be seen that all the other mean values were not too distinctively varied, ranging from 2.81 to 2.49. The standard deviation was highest at 1.009 for students' skill to follow study plans. The problem-solving skills in the current research was shown better than that in Veerasamy (2019)'s study. Compared to Nguyễn Thị Lê (2022)'s research when over a half of the participants did not follow their study plan well, this research had a better mean

of 2.94. In addition, the result showed the preference of exchanging information with friends to consulting the lecturer.

4.3. Reading-and-handling-document skills

Handling documents, especially supplementary documents are necessary for the students to be successful in their study. Five subcomponents related to this aspect are the ability to search for reading supplementary documents, to determine the goals to read documents, to evaluate documents, to take notes and filter useful information from documents, and to apply knowledge in documents to practical learning. The results again showed the students' fair and good skills at these

aspects, with the best skills at determining the goals to read documents. The results complemented Phạm Thanh Cường (2019)

when he only reported the readiness of the students to read the documents apart from the textbook.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of their reading-and-handling-document skills

		Students' skill to search for reading supplementary documents	Students' skill to determine the goals to read documents	Students' skill to evaluate documents	Students' skill to take notes and filter useful information from documents	Students' skill to apply knowledge in documents to practical learning
N	Valid	48	48	48	48	48
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1
Mean		2.98	3.19	3.02	3.00	2.92
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3 ^a	4	3	3	3
Std. Deviation		.956	.842	.863	.825	.919
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	4	4	4

4.4. Time management skills

The time management skills were divided into five sub-skills: skill to estimate the amount of time needed for each task skill, to identify wasted time, to divide difficult tasks into small tasks with corresponding time periods, to set aside time to prioritize some tasks, to use rest time appropriately. Most of the students

thought that they could estimate the amount of time needed for each task skill well with a mean of 3.20, the highest figure. They also believed that they used rest time appropriately (mean = 3.11). Other sub-skills were perceived well as well. This report affirmed Nguyễn Hoàng Khắc Hiếu & Huỳnh Văn Sơn (2011)'s results.

Table 4 Students' perceptions of their time management skills

		Students' skill to estimate the amount of time needed for each task skill	Students' skill to identify wasted time	Students' skill to divide difficult tasks into small tasks with corresponding time periods	Students' skill to set aside time to prioritize some tasks	Students' skill to use rest time appropriately
N	Valid	46	47	47	47	47
	Missing	3	2	2	2	2
Mean		3.20	2.85	2.89	3.06	3.11
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		4	2 ^a	3	3 ^a	3
Std. Deviation		.833	.884	.866	.845	.814
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	4	4	4

4.5. Self-assessment-and-improvement skills

Table 5 Students' perceptions of their self-assessment skills

		Students' skill to self-assess the ability to implement goals, tasks, and study plans	Students' skill to identify difficulties	Students' skill to self-regulate emotional behavior	Students' skill to learn from experience	Students' skill to self-assess your own self-study abilities	Students' skill to self-assess the academic results
N	Valid	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Missing	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mean		3.06	3.04	2.89	2.94	3.09	3.09
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	4	3	3	3	3
Std. Deviation		.734	.977	.866	.895	.747	.855
Minimum		2	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	4	4	4	4

The final element of the self-study skills in this research is self-assessment-and-improvement skills. In terms of self-assessment, they are the skill to self-assess the ability to implement goals, tasks, and study plans, skill to identify difficulties, skill to self-assess their own self-study abilities and self-assess the academic results. Most students were confident in self-assessment with all means over than 3.00. The self-improvement skills, which composed of skill to self-regulate emotional behavior, skill to learn from experience, were reported at lower mean score than the self-assessment skills, but the perceptions of being fair or good can be seen a great deal. Such results echoed with Huỳnh Văn Sơn (2012)'s findings which points out a positive score for students' self-assessment skills at 3.52 and for their self-regulated emotional behavior skills at 3.56.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study on a university's English-majored seniors' perceptions of their self-study skills in a course has released positive results. Among five subskill components, time management skills, followed by assessment-and-improvement skills were the most prominent. Other overall scores were positive too. To be more specific, the outstanding numbers went for the sub-skills in determining the general contents of the course and the time bound of the course (planning skills), exchanging information with friends and choosing

self-study methods (implementing skills), determining the goals to read documents (reading-and handling document skills), estimating time amounts for tasks (time management skills) and self-assessment skills. The results imply that the course has trained the students' self-study skills fairly effectively. The involvement in the research has helped the students to realise their strengths and weaknesses in their self-study skills. Furthermore, the detailed figures recommend the teachers have more appropriate methods to enhance their students' self-study skills.

Within a limited time frame to conduct the research, certain limitations remained and are expected to be solved in further studies. The number of the participants should be increased. The study method should be complemented. Other courses can be involved to compare and contrast.

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