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## The issue of self-study and guidance for students' self-study in the context of the current industrial revolution

**Dao Anh Huy**

Faculty of Medicine, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Vietnam  
Corresponding Email: [dahuy@ntt.edu.vn](mailto:dahuy@ntt.edu.vn)

**Phan Thi Hai Ha**

Faculty of Medicine, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Vietnam  
Email: [haphth@ntt.edu.vn](mailto:haphth@ntt.edu.vn)

**Abstract**---According to the law of development, external forces, regardless of their importance or strength, can only serve as supporting factors that promote and create favorable conditions. Internal forces, however, are the decisive factors for the self-development of any entity. Accordingly, the teacher's instruction, no matter how significant, remains an external force that facilitates, motivates, and catalyzes the student's process of self-study, self-development, and growth. The student's capacity for self-learning, even when still in the process of formation, constitutes the internal force that determines their personal development. Thus, self-study is the most crucial path for learners to acquire knowledge and achieve academic success. Ultimately, it is the learner, not the teacher, who determines the effectiveness of learning. This article focuses on examining and clarifying the concept of self-study, its forms and stages, as well as several issues related to guiding students in self-study.

**Keywords**---self-study, higher education, students, industrial revolution, contemporary context.

**Introduction**

In his educational thought, President Ho Chi Minh placed particular emphasis on the role of self-study. According to him, self-study holds a uniquely important and irreplaceable position: “*Lấy tự học làm cốt*” (“Take self-study as the core”). The term “*cốt*” can be understood as essential, pivotal, central, the backbone, or the foundation. Thus, self-study constitutes the core element of learning activities,



the internal driving force that determines the quality of education. Other factors merely function as external supports. Learning without self-study is like a body without a skeleton, unable to stand or sustain itself.

To fulfill such an important role, self-study must be driven by a noble purpose and guided by clear, concrete objectives. Ho Chi Minh also emphasized that self-study should be carried out proactively. This means learning in a completely self-directed and autonomous manner: without waiting for reminders, without depending on assigned tasks, but rather by managing one's own learning process. This includes independently planning, implementing, and monitoring study activities, taking ownership of one's time, and conducting self-assessment.

This conception encompasses current educational notions such as self-learning, guided self-study, independent learning, self-assessment, and self-education. Self-study, understood as the process of independently acquiring scientific knowledge and cultivating practical skills without direct instruction or supervision, enriches knowledge, sharpens thinking, shapes personality, fosters motivation, and supports continuous progress. How self-study should be understood at the university level, its forms, stages, and the methods for effective guidance remain an issue of both theoretical and practical significance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Research on self-study and self-learning capacity is grounded in several modern educational and psychological theories. First, Constructivist Theory (Piaget, Vygotsky) emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and interaction. Second, Self-Directed Learning Theory (Knowles) highlights the learner's role in setting goals, selecting strategies, and evaluating outcomes. In addition, Metacognitive Theory (Flavell) asserts that effective self-study requires planning, monitoring, and regulating one's cognitive processes. Furthermore, the concept of Lifelong Learning (UNESCO) views self-learning as a core competence that enables individuals to adapt to change and sustain personal development. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a solid foundation for analyzing the role, mechanisms, and effectiveness of self-study in higher education.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Self-Study and Forms of Self**

Self-study (self-learning) is the process by which learners make deliberate efforts to acquire knowledge through their own actions, directed toward specific goals. It is inherently linked to the learning process and has been a subject of reflection by philosophers and educators across cultures and historical periods. From different research perspectives, scholars have offered diverse perspectives. Globally, many educators have defined self-study as the learner's active, independent engagement with the object of knowledge. When examining self-study in relation to the teaching-learning process, Professor Dang Vu Hoat and Associate Professor Ha Thi Duc, in their work *Theory of Higher Education Teaching*, asserted: "*Self-study is a fundamental organizational form of instruction in higher education. It is a form*

*of individual cognition aimed at mastering a system of knowledge and skills, carried out independently by learners either inside or outside the classroom, with or without reliance on prescribed textbooks” (Dang, 2008, p. 35).*

Highlighting the role of self-study, Nguyen Van Dao emphasized: *“Self-study must be a conscious undertaking of each individual, arising from a proper awareness of its decisive role in the accumulation of personal knowledge, the quality of one’s work, and the progress of society” (Nguyen, 2000, p. 11).*

Professor Nguyen Canh Toan stands as a remarkable example of lifelong self-study. Through self-learning, he achieved profound intellectual accomplishments and contributed invaluable experiences to Vietnam’s educational development. He offered a comprehensive understanding of self-study: *“Self-study means to think independently, to use one’s intellectual capacities (observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis, etc.), and sometimes even physical strength (when using tools), along with personal qualities, motivations, emotions, and worldviews (such as honesty, objectivity, determination, perseverance, patience, passion for science, ambition to succeed, and the ability to turn difficulties into advantages), to master a particular domain of human knowledge and make it one’s own” (Nguyen, 1997, p. 162).*

A positive attitude toward learning alone is not sufficient for effective self-study; learners must also acquire specific skills to implement it. These include skills in managing one’s own learning, planning and organizing study activities, and monitoring as well as evaluating the process and outcomes of self-study.

From the perspectives discussed above, we define self-study as the process in which learners mobilize their intellectual capacities, life experience, emotions, and willpower to engage actively with a subject of inquiry, thereby independently acquiring knowledge and skills, while also developing their own character with or without the intervention of teachers.

Thus, self-study can be regarded as a form of cognitive activity through which learners appropriate knowledge, practice operations and actions, and gradually form skills and competencies. It enables learners to discover new knowledge and methods of action through their own efforts, fostering dynamism and creativity. Viewed as an independent, autonomous, and creative process of knowledge acquisition, the cycle of self-study for university students may be divided into three stages:

Stage 1: Self-research. Learners independently explore, observe, describe, explain, identify problems, and generate new knowledge, thereby producing initial or preliminary individual outputs.

Stage 2: Self-expression. Learners articulate their ideas in writing or speech, present and defend their initial knowledge or products, and engage in dialogue with peers and instructors, transforming individual outputs into products recognized within the classroom community.

Stage 3: Self-assessment and adjustment. Following self-expression and interaction with peers and teachers, and after receiving feedback, learners evaluate their work, identify errors, and revise their outputs into academically valid products.

This cycle of self-research → self-expression → self-assessment and adjustment essentially mirrors the scientific process of problem identification, orientation toward solutions, and problem-solving.

As society advances, the demand for knowledge grows while available time remains limited. Consequently, self-study manifests in diverse forms and degrees, reflecting its indispensable role in continuous personal and professional development.

### **Forms of Self-Study**

Self-study can be divided into three basic forms:

The first form: Individual self-study based on personal interests and independent curiosity, without books or teacher guidance. The outcome of this type of self-study may lead to creativity and the discovery of new scientific knowledge, representing the highest level of self-study. This form requires a deep passion for exploring new knowledge, along with both broad and profound prior knowledge. At this level, learners, even without books or teachers, can still effectively organize their own learning activities through practice and real-life training.

The second form: Self-study with books but without direct teacher guidance. In this form, there may be two situations: Learners study on their own using books, without teacher guidance. Here, learners engage with the content of books to develop understanding and critical thinking. Fully mastering self-study with books is the ultimate goal of building a lifelong learning society; Learners study with distant teacher guidance. Although the teacher is not physically present, communication takes place through traditional or modern means such as exchanging questions, clarifications, assignments, feedback, and assessments.

The third form: Self-study with books and with teachers providing direct guidance during certain class sessions, after which students continue studying independently at home.

In this form, learners must take initiative, organize their own study plans, and apply their intellectual and practical skills to fulfill the requirements set by teachers. Self-study here is closely linked to the teaching process, influenced by multiple factors, with teachers orienting students on both the content and methods of self-study to acquire knowledge.

Thus, self-study plays a crucial role in the learner's educational journey. It is a continuous flow that must not be interrupted; no matter how busy or demanding life may be, self-study should never cease. It is through self-study that individuals can unleash their inner potential, reveal and affirm themselves. Only self-study can awaken the dormant abilities within learners, enabling them to express themselves fully. In this sense, self-study embodies liberation and carries the highest humanistic value. Discussions with teachers, peers, groups, or seminars are only external supports. Self-study remains the inner force that directly determines success. While group discussions and academic seminars are increasingly valued for mobilizing collective intelligence, their effectiveness still depends on each member's preparation. Those with strong self-study capacity can

contribute most productively. Ultimately, the core lies in the self-study efforts of each individual.

Many students succeed when they plan their study time scientifically, balancing in-class learning with self-study at home. If all students adopted such an approach, the quality of education would improve rapidly. Moreover, college and university studies require students to absorb large and complex volumes of knowledge. Therefore, beyond class hours, students must engage in self-study and research to expand and deepen their understanding, enriching their knowledge and enhancing both academic performance and future professional competence.

Frequent, active, self-disciplined, and independent self-study not only helps students broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the world and humanity but also shapes their moral, spiritual, and aesthetic values. It allows them to inherit and develop traditional values while creating new ones. This process builds scientific habits of living and working, trains perseverance and determination, sharpens critical thinking, fosters enthusiasm for learning, and cultivates a passion for scientific research.

However, this does not mean underestimating the role of teachers. In any teaching process, especially at the college and university level, teachers play a particularly important role in organizing, guiding, and directing student learning activities. Each teacher must teach students how to self-study, to deepen acquired knowledge, to learn from teachers, and to learn from peers. This involves transmitting methods of acquiring and enriching knowledge. To achieve this, *every teacher must be a shining example of self-study and creativity*. Learners should take full advantage of every opportunity to learn anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances, through all means, and from everyone.

### **Guidance for Self-Study and Methods of Self-Study Guidance**

Everyone can self-study to a greater or lesser extent (except for those without cognitive capacity). However, this does not mean they already possess the proper scientific methods for self-study. To awaken and transform the potential of self-study into reality, students need experience and guidance on how to study effectively to achieve good results. In other words, the process of self-study is an independent and personal activity, but cannot be separated from the process of teaching and learning. Broadly speaking, self-study guidance is the process of helping learners form appropriate and effective methods of self-learning and research. This enables them to continuously improve the quality of their study and scientific research both during their academic years and later in their professional careers.

Knowledge is as vast as the ocean; learners can access it through many different channels and sources. However, they must know how to select, process, and internalize that knowledge to make it their own. Learning cannot be rushed, just as a mountain climber or a long-distance traveler must distribute their energy wisely. With proper methods, one will surely reach the destination. Teaching is not about cramming pre-existing knowledge into students but rather about

guiding them in learning methods, problem-solving strategies, and systematic approaches—thus avoiding detours and blind trails.

In all areas of human activity, the question of method is always paramount: choosing and applying the right method is essential to realizing ideas and achieving goals. A proper choice of method leads to correct thinking and action, while the wrong choice results in the opposite. Francis Bacon argued that method is like a lamp lighting the traveler's way in the dark, while Hegel regarded method as the very soul of the object.

The term *method* originates from the Greek word *Methodos*, meaning path, way, measure, or means to achieve a goal. In the field of education, the concept refers to teaching methods. Method is one of the fundamental components of the teaching process; it directly affects the attainment of objectives and content, as well as the assurance of teaching quality and effectiveness.

In their book *Teaching Methods of Political Economy in Universities and Colleges*, the authors assert: *“Teaching methods are a combination of activities, uniting teachers and students in order to accomplish the instructional tasks of the school”* (Dau, 2000, p.11).

According to Nguyễn Ngọc Quang, *“The teaching method is the way the teacher works in order to enable learners to consciously, actively, and independently achieve the goals of teaching”*. In the book *Modern Teaching Theory – Some Issues of Innovation in Teaching Methods*, Professor Bernd Meier defines teaching methods as follows: *“A teaching method is the form and manner of activity of teachers and students under specific teaching conditions in order to achieve the teaching objectives”* (Meier & Nguyen, 2012, p.46).

Thus, the concept of teaching methods is complex and multifaceted. Some key characteristics of teaching methods can be summarized as follows: Teaching methods are oriented toward the realization of teaching objectives; Teaching methods represent the unity of teaching and learning approaches; Teaching methods integrate both training and educational functions; Teaching methods reflect the unity between the logic of teaching content and the logic of cognitive psychology; Teaching methods possess both external and internal aspects; Teaching methods encompass both objective and subjective dimensions; Teaching methods represent the unity of actions and instructional tools.

Furthermore, the general orientation of educational reform in Vietnam today emphasizes the development of learners' competencies. Accordingly, teaching methods can be understood as the forms and ways of organizing the activities of teachers and students in prepared learning environments, aiming not only to achieve teaching objectives but also to foster the development of individual competencies.

The method of guiding self-study is the way in which teachers influence learners to guide them in self-study, enabling them to effectively acquire high-quality knowledge to achieve the objectives of teaching. From these definitions, the method of guiding self-study can be understood as a teaching approach that ensures a unified collaboration between teachers and students in the teaching-

learning process, thereby fulfilling assigned learning tasks. Through their specific methods, teachers guide learners to self-study, helping them actively acquire knowledge anytime and anywhere. However, at the student age, learners' personalities are still developing, their cognitive abilities and problem-solving capacities in both learning and life remain limited. At times, they may fail to recognize learning tasks or perform them without initiative and enthusiasm. Teachers, therefore, must provide more detailed and specific guidance while closely monitoring, encouraging, and assessing students' self-study process. For this reason, every teacher needs to adopt methods of guiding self-study that are appropriate to the learner's characteristics, in order to help them achieve the following outcomes: Ability to develop and implement a reasonable study plan; Ability to work independently, including skills in collecting, reading, and taking notes from materials; extracting information; working in groups; systematizing and generalizing materials; solving problems; reviewing; and regularly self-assessing one's own knowledge in order to evaluate intellectual progress; Ability to analyze, compare, and generalize issues, and to apply theoretical knowledge to solving exercises in class as well as in practical contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Self-study activities and the capacity for independent learning play a pivotal role in students' academic development. They serve as essential means for acquiring knowledge, cultivating skills, and shaping professional competencies for the future. Through self-study, students gradually transform the collective knowledge of humanity into their own intellectual assets, thereby deepening their understanding, consolidating and retaining knowledge, broadening their horizons, and effectively applying what they have learned and researched to address new learning tasks. To ensure the effectiveness of self-study, instructors should provide both direct and indirect guidance through lectures and academic activities, thereby equipping students with appropriate and scientific methods of independent learning. Beyond this, higher education institutions should foster an academic environment that encourages autonomy, critical thinking, and continuous self-improvement, enabling students to become lifelong learners capable of adapting to the dynamic demands of society.

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