

INDEPENDENT STUDY SKILLS AS A KEY TO SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to inform the readers about the role of independent study skills in higher education, why independent study skills are needed. Moreover, it discusses the points how to develop these skills.

Keywords: Independent study skills, learner autonomy, motivation, time management, success, goal setting

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Different people understand success in various ways. Being successful in study is one of the important aims of every student. However, it is not easy thing to do, especially in language learning. Resiliency is one of the key features of being effective in life. When one feels socially and academically efficient and confident, then he or she can develop resiliency and sense of purpose. In higher education, students may come across stress if they do not develop their independent study skills.

There is the full basis to approve that many scientists have brought the invaluable contribution to studying various properties of teaching independent study skills (ISS) for university learners.

Independent study skills are the skills that help the learners to make their learning and studying process effective, in other words they are the collection of the transferable life skills. According to Pritchard A, studying in higher education is not same as studying in many other contexts; many distinctions exist, for instance, between learning to cook cake and comparing different philosophical thought. The learning experienced in a formal setting for five-year-olds will necessarily be different to the formal setting of a university. To the question what the learning means it can be answered that “learning is something in which we participate almost all of the time. This relates to what is known as ‘life-long learning’ and has also been called learning ‘from the cradle to the grave’. Learning encompasses all human behavior and all human endeavors” [1.]

There are several differences between studying at university and higher education. One of the essential difference between them is the sum of encourage, promote and control which is provided to learners. At school, pupils meet teachers frequently and homework is fixed and controlled on a regular basis. On the contrary, at university students may not see their tutors very often as at school. However, it can differ from place to place, from teacher to teacher. Moreover, at university, students participate at lectures or seminars and assessment can be based on one task or one exam paper. The indication here is that after entering the university usually most of the students feel under depression and alone due to new environment,

¹ Pritchard A, (2008) Studying and Learning at University *Vital Skills for Success in Your Degree*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London EC1Y 1SP

conditions, and new surroundings. In such cases, freshmen have to take immediate steps and learn to use some skills and strategies as planning and fulfilling the task, setting their goals, managing their time, and increasing language skills to be adapted and to correct the situation.

Key points about study skills are mentioned as following according to <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/study-skills.html>: One will develop his/her own personal approach to study and learning according to their demands

- Study skills are not subject specific- they are universal, moreover, after acquiring, these skills can be applied in any field. Surely, one has to know the knowledge of his/her special subject area, thus, study skills help to get most of it.

- Study skills needed to be practiced and increased. It will provide chance to a person to become self-aware and self-confident. Once mastered, the advantages of study skills are incomparable to anything else.

- It is worth to mention that independent study skills are not only for students. They are useful for anyone in the world as life skills; furthermore, study skills will be transferred beyond the education into new contexts. For example, organizational skills, decision-making, goal-setting, time- management, problem solving, and many other skills are very important skills in life.

The list of study skills can be divided into two types:

- 1) Skills which are directly related to study, such as essay writing skills, improving reading skills, note-taking skills, etc.

- 2) Skills which are more general but are important to studying, in other words, life skills such as transferrable skills, interpersonal skills, time- managing skills, effective presentation skills, etc.

According to the web address <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation>, “Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain behavior. It represents the reasons for people's actions, desires, and needs. Motivation can also be defined as one's direction to behavior, or what causes a person to want to repeat a behavior and vice versa. A motive is what prompts the person to act in a certain way, or at least develop an inclination for specific behavior” Success is closely related with motivation. Every person has different interest towards various things. Keeping motivation to studying is one of the essential factors of being effective in study. Cottrell. S suggests some techniques how to keep one motivated:

- Being realistic — attaining requires attempt and diligence, even moments exist that make one feel discouraged because of impediments. Although positive thinking has its own benefits, unrealistic thinking can lead to no fulfillment as one is not ready to face with obstacles that come across. Thorough thinking and planning how to avoid expected difficulties prepare person to be ready to fight for success than being loser.

- Setting high expectations: the more high expectations one sets the more results one gets. If one's expectations are low then achievements can be very little. Once person sets high expectations, she or he needs to plan, being sure to create the right chance to self.

- Setting realistic milestones: if goals are realistic, they will be accomplishable. When one confuses dreams with goals, he or she may get discouraged due to dreams not coming true.

- Rewarding achievement: rewarding yourself after reaching to the target is good hint to stay motivated. Bonuses can be something one would really appreciate, at the same time, suitable to the volume of the job.

- Recording success: keeping the record of your achievements can help to monitor it. A record of past successes can keep one enthusiastic for future steps.

- **Hunting out the interest:** when person is interested in the task, it may seem easier despite its difficulty. In spite of being difficult or not engaging, there is a chance for every task to be made interesting.

Next important factor in efficient study is time-management skills. In order to escape from miserable outcomes as missed deadlines, poor work quality, higher stress levels, or ineffective attempts in study one needs to develop time-management skills.

Some tips for time management are indicated in <http://mcckc.edu/PDF/Counseling/Time%20Management%20Tips.pdf>:

- **Blocks of study time and breaks**

As soon as the term begins and schedule is set, it is good idea to establish and plan for blocks of time to study for every week. Ideal time for blocks can be about 50 minutes; however, some challenging tasks demand more periodic breaks. If needed study blocks have to be reduced—but you should not forget to continue studying. What you do during your break should give you an opportunity to have a snack, relax, or otherwise refresh or re-energize yourself. For example, place blocks of time when you are most productive: are you a morning person or a night owl?

- **Dedicated study spaces**

Dedicated study spaces help to economize one's time. Usually students complain about not having enough time to do their assignments. In fact, while they are preparing lessons distracters such as mobile phones, TVs, messages from friends do not let them concentrate. Thus setting a place free from distraction (no cell phone, ...) where one can maximize their concentration and be free of the disturbance that friends or hobbies can bring is necessary. One must possess a special place which is free from any hindrance easy to escape if required.

- **Weekly reviews**

Weekly reviews and updates have great importance in managing one's time. Every Sunday, reviewing tasks, notes, and calendar is suggested. One should keep in mind that weekly routine must adapt to the task deadlines and exam approach.

- **Prioritizing assignments**

Beginning the study with the most difficult subject that causes you a lot of problems is advised. The more one is fresh, and has much energy, the more results one will get.

- **Achieve "stage one"—get something done!**

Exactness of a task is not always clear until one begins doing it. "Another adage is that "perfection is the enemy of good", especially when it prevents you from starting! Given that you build in review, roughly draft your idea and get going! You will have time to edit and develop later" [2.]

- **Postponing unnecessary activities until the work is done!**

Delaying tasks or routines that can be postponed until one's school work is finished is suggested. This can be the most difficult challenge of time management. Instead of saying "no," "later" is preferable.

- **Identify resources to help you**

There is always outside resources such as tutors, books, friends that can help one to economize the time and energy. Using them effectively is up to us.

² Pritchard A, (2008) Studying and Learning at University *Vital Skills for Success in Your Degree*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London EC1Y 1SP

- Use your free time wisely

Defining the time which can be appropriate for you to study something can save your time. It may be time when you are walking, riding a bicycle, etc. so every free minute should be used wisely.

- Reviewing notes and readings just before class

It helps you to clarify which points of the lesson you do not understand and gives you an opportunity to ask questions and make it clear for you. Furthermore, it shows to the teacher that you are interested in subject and ready for the class.

- Reviewing lecture notes just after class

Reviewing lecture material immediately after class provides chance to distinct what is not so clear about the topic and not forgetting the point you have chance to ask your teacher. The first 24 hours are critical.

- Creating effective aids such as “TO DO” list, daily/ weekly planner, or long-term planners

These kinds of efficient aids can help a person to plan the day well organized, and realize the importance of every task, when the deadline is for each assignment.

In addition to these tips, Rita O’ Donghue provides some more guidelines for managing time effectively. One should use available time fruitfully rather than waiting for 3-4 hours at a time for studying. It is better exploit half- hours; 20 minutes study slots in a day. Moreover, it is suggested to set up the practice of periodical, constant short study sessions than waiting for “3-4” or “whole day” study slots happen.

- Use every minute of your time effectively, do not waste it.
- Once you have made up your mind what you will do, accomplish it.
- It is suggested to come to an end if you started something. One can increase and shorten time according to his/her needs.
- Time yourself. Accomplish your arranged tasks within your set limits.
- Divide tasks into smaller, controllable parts or sections in order to accomplish and reach your goals.
- Summarize what you have attained, where you are now, and make a plan of your further actions. Keep moving on.

Moving to the next point, it should be pointed out that many people feel as if lost on the Earth. In spite of working hard, no achievement is identified. As it is mentioned in <https://www.mindtools.com/page6.html> a key reason that they feel this way is that they haven't devoted sufficient amount of time thinking about what they want from life, and haven't established themselves formal goals.

In order to establish successful future, appropriate and effective goal setting is essential, moreover, setting goals is needed for motivating oneself to turn ones dream of the future into reality. The process of setting goals helps one choose where he/she wishes to exist in life. Being aware of what one wants to accomplish or attain, one can realize where one should focus and emphasize on attempts. As Wilson, E. Bedford, D (2009) indicates “When you are setting goals, do try and make sure they are SMART – specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-based. However, the acronym SMART can be extended to give a broader definition, and it is worth checking that your development plan is:

S – specific, significant, stretching, short

M – measurable, meaningful, motivational

A – agreed upon, attainable, achievable, acceptable, action-oriented

R – realistic, relevant, reasonable, rewarding, results-oriented

T – time-based, timely, tangible, trackable” [3.]

One always has to distinguish the difference between setting the goal and dream.

For example, if I say my goal is to fly it is not appropriate because according to SMART mnemonic it is not realistic. The reason of setting goal is that it encourages one to have long-term vision and short-term motivation. Appropriately set goals can help one to manage time and sources efficiently so that one can have most use of it. Below some more tips by Wilson, E. Bedford, D (2009) discussed for goal setting:

- Avoid using negative statements, use always positive ones for goal setting.
- Be exact: Set specific goals, identifying clear and specific time bound, dates, in order to determine success.
- Set precedence – When you have several goals, give each a priority. It promotes one to focus on accomplishing the most essential ones first.
- Write goals down – This shapes up them and gives them more strength.
- Set realistic goals – sometimes goals can seem or sound ideal but not real. It is important to set goals that you can attain.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that developing independent study skill can be effective not only in language learning but also in all spheres of life. When one obtains these skills such as how to stay motivated, managing time efficiently and setting effective goals, they help them for whole life to be successful.

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