



IMPROVING INDEPENDENT LEARNING SKILLS OF UPPER SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MASTERING SUBJECTS

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"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think" said Albert Einstein. Einstein emphasized that true education goes beyond memorizing facts-it's about developing the ability to think critically and independently (Butt, 2019).

Abstract: *This article explores strategies to enhance the independent learning skills of a upper school students in mastering academic subjects. As education increasingly shifts towards a student-centered approach, developing self- directed learning capabilities becomes critical. The article discusses the importance of fostering motivation, effective time management, and the use of technology as key enablers of independent learning. Futhermore it examines the role of teachers in guiding students towards autonomy by providing appropriate resources, feedback fee and fostering a growth mindset. The study also highlights the benefits of cultivating independent learning habits, including improved academic performance greater problem-solving abilities and better preparation for higher education and lifelong learning.*

Key words: *Self-assessing, schedules, mentorship, programs, AQF, autonomous.*

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century education system pays great attention not only to the acquisition of knowledge, but also to the development of independent knowledge acquisition skills. Formation of independent study skills in students during the high school period will help them not only to understand the subjects they are studying in depth, but also to be successful in their future studies and work. During this period, students feel the need to develop skills such as proper time allocation, data analysis, and independent problem solving. At the same time, the formation of motivation and a sense of striving towards the goal in them also serves to make the learning process more effective. Independent learning or sometimes called autonomous learning is a learning concept introduced in the Western countries. This learning concept basically gives the students more responsibility so that they can participate actively in the teaching and learning activities both inside and outside the class. Students are also expected to share ideas about the learning activities. In this case, the teaching and learning activities in the class will be centered on the students and not on the teacher. The concept of independent learning has been increasingly attracting the interests of those involved in the educational field. This is so, as first, every individual has the right to fulfil their learning needs so that they can learn what they like or what they want (Crabbe, 1993). The concept of autonomous or independent learning itself however has not been fully understood by those who are involved in the world of education. There is an interpretation that autonomous learning is without the teacher (Little, 1991).

The importance of harnessing intentional curriculum design to promote student well-being



In 2011, a range of speakers at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education's (CSHE) National Summit on the Mental Health of Tertiary Students in Melbourne discussed the importance of developing "improved policy and practice responses to the growing incidence of mental health difficulties and mental illness on campus" (CSHE, 2011). Further, a recent significant study of more than 5,000 students across six different faculties and graduate schools at the University of Melbourne confirmed the experience of high levels of psychological distress amongst the student body (Larcombe, 2014). Research indicates that psychological well-being declines in the first year of tertiary study (Larcombe, 2012; Townes O'Brien, et al., 2011), suggesting that there is something about the university experience that contributes to this phenomenon.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Niemic, Ryan, & Deci, 2010) provides a theoretical framework for justifying and informing the explicit teaching of independent learning skills. Harnessing the empowering nature of SDT can help students to become increasingly intrinsically and autonomously motivated, and develop their capacity to self-manage and self-regulate (Field, et al., 2014b). The explicit teaching of independent learning skills is one example of how SDT-informed strategies for student empowerment and capacity building can be integrated with ease into the first year curriculum. Before proceeding with a closer examination of relevant tenets of SDT, a deeper understanding of independent learning is desirable.

Independent learning in higher education

Independent learning skills are one of the "secrets to success" for tertiary level learning, and the importance of such skills is widely acknowledged in Australian universities. There are consistent references to "independent learning" in statements of graduate learning outcomes and capabilities across the sector. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) specification for the Bachelor Degree (2013) refers to graduates at that level having "a broad and coherent body of knowledge ... as a basis for independent lifelong learning," and "communication skills to present a clear, coherent and independent exposition of knowledge and ideas" (48). The expectation that students come to university equipped to be independent learners, and the absence of explicit instruction as to the learning skills our students need to be successful learners in our disciplines, is a significant student well-being issue which is discussed in more detail in the following section (Field, Duffy, & Huggins, 2014a).

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, developing independent learning skills is crucial for upper school students. With the increasing complexity of subjects and the demands of academic achievement, students must learn how to take ownership of their learning. Fostering these skills not only helps them succeed in school but also prepares them for lifelong learning in higher education and beyond. This article explores effective strategies for enhancing independent learning in upper school students and highlights the importance of these skills in mastering subjects.

1. Understanding Independent Learning

Independent learning refers to the ability of students to take charge of their own educational process, setting goals, managing their time effectively, seeking resources, and



self-assessing their progress. It involves a proactive approach to learning where students are motivated to explore, understand, and apply new concepts without constant guidance from teachers. In the context of upper school, where subjects become more specialized and demanding, the development of such skills is particularly important.

2. Importance of Independent Learning in Mastering Subjects

Mastering subjects in upper school requires more than just memorizing facts; it involves critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to connect concepts across different topics. Independent learners are better equipped to tackle complex tasks because they:

Develop Critical Thinking: They ask questions, analyze information, and seek deeper understanding rather than passively absorbing content.

Enhance Problem-Solving Skills: By exploring subjects on their own, students learn to identify problems and come up with creative solutions.

Improve Time Management: Independent learners prioritize their tasks, set realistic goals, and manage their time to meet deadlines.

Build Self-Discipline: Learning to study independently encourages students to stay focused, even in the absence of direct supervision.

3. Strategies for Promoting Independent Learning

There are several strategies that schools and educators can implement to help upper school students become more independent learners:

a. Teaching Time Management and Organizational Skills

Time management is one of the most essential skills for independent learning. Schools can provide students with workshops or courses on how to break down tasks into smaller steps, set achievable goals, and create effective study schedules. Tools like planners or digital apps can also aid students in organizing their assignments and study time.

b. Encouraging Self-Assessment and Reflection

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their learning progress regularly. This can be done through self-assessment exercises where they evaluate their understanding of subjects and identify areas where improvement is needed. Reflection helps students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, guiding their future learning efforts.

c. Providing Access to Learning Resources

In a world where information is readily available, providing students with access to a variety of learning resources (such as online tutorials, educational apps, and research materials) is crucial. Schools should ensure that students know how to use these resources effectively. Training in digital literacy, including how to evaluate the credibility of online sources, is essential for independent research.

d. Fostering a Growth Mindset

Encouraging a growth mindset—where students believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort—helps build resilience in learning. Teachers should praise effort and persistence rather than just outcomes, motivating students to embrace challenges and learn from failures.

e. Blended Learning and Flipped Classrooms



Incorporating blended learning approaches, where students engage in both in-person and online learning activities, fosters independence. A flipped classroom model, where students are introduced to new material outside of class (via videos, readings, etc.) and use class time for discussion or problem-solving, can also encourage students to take charge of their learning.

f. Promoting Collaborative Learning

While independent learning focuses on self-direction, collaborative learning activities can also enhance these skills. Group projects, peer teaching, and study groups allow students to share knowledge, support each other, and develop communication skills, all while fostering independence.

4. The Role of Teachers in Encouraging Independence

Although independent learning emphasizes student autonomy, teachers play a critical role in facilitating this process. Teachers should:

Act as Guides: Rather than simply delivering content, teachers should guide students on how to learn. This includes teaching research skills, how to approach problems, and encouraging curiosity.

Provide Constructive Feedback: Timely and constructive feedback helps students understand their progress and how they can improve, reinforcing independent study habits.

Create a Supportive Environment: A classroom culture that values self-directed learning, where students feel comfortable asking questions and exploring new ideas, fosters independence.

5. Challenges and Solutions

Despite the benefits, promoting independent learning can face several challenges. Some students may struggle with motivation or lack confidence in their abilities. Others may find it difficult to manage their time effectively or feel overwhelmed by the amount of self-directed work. To overcome these challenges:

Schools can offer mentorship programs: Pairing students with mentors who can guide them through their independent learning journey can provide additional support.

Offering study skills workshops: These can help students develop the necessary skills to tackle their studies independently.

Gradual Responsibility: Teachers can gradually shift more responsibility to students, starting with structured independent tasks and slowly increasing the level of autonomy.

CONCLUSION

In today's fast-paced world, the ability to learn independently is a vital skill for upper school students. By teaching time management, promoting self-reflection, providing resources, and encouraging a growth mindset, educators can help students take ownership of their learning. As students become more adept at learning independently, they will not only excel in mastering subjects but also be well-prepared for the challenges of higher education and beyond. Although students interpret independent learning with various interpretations, students have already practiced independent activities and felt many benefits of these activities. Students support when the lecturer gives the task in the form of



independent learning activities. They also said that they would later provide independent learning activities to their students in the future when they became English teachers.

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