

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING AND BEING AN INDEPENDENT LEARNER

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Annotation: *'Independent Learning' is often linked with other approaches to learning such as 'personalization', 'student-centered learning' and 'ownership' of learning. Discussion of independent learning frequently arises in the context of important issues such as student-teacher roles and relationships, and the role of information and communications technology (ICT) in learning.*

Key words: *independent learner, motivation, skills, self-evaluation, self-learning.*

The aim of this literature review was to identify reliable, robust and relevant research to provide a detailed picture of independent learning and its possible impact on students. The review found a number of different terms to describe independent learning, the most common reflecting the idea of 'self-regulated learning'. The review highlighted some evidence of benefits to students particularly in the form of improved motivation and better management of their learning. The authors of the review emphasized that independent learning does not merely involve students working alone and stressed the important role teachers can play in enabling and supporting independent learning.

The review suggested that successful independent learning depends on a number of external and internal factors. External factors involve the creation of a strong relationship between teachers and students and the establishment of an 'enabling environment' in which ICT can be an important element. Internal factors are the skills that individual students have to acquire. These include cognitive skills such as focusing of memory and attention and problem-solving, metacognitive skills associated with an understanding of how learning occurs, and affective skills related to feelings and emotions.

What were the benefits of independent learning for students?

The review found some evidence of the benefits of independent learning; including:

- improved academic performance;

- increased motivation and confidence;

- greater student awareness of their limitations and their ability to manage them;
- enabling teachers to provide differentiated tasks for students; and
- fostering social inclusion by countering alienation.

The authors found widespread evidence of improved academic performance but acknowledged that this could not always be related solely to independent learning approaches. One example from the UK they refer to is from Thomas Telford School, the first comprehensive school in which 100% of students gained A–C grades in at least five GCSEs. The school claimed that one of the reasons for this success was the development of independent learning skills across the school. A study from the Netherlands suggested that: Students in self-regulated learning environments are more motivated to learn, report more enjoyment of the material and are more actively involved in their learning than those who study in more restrictive environments.

Other research examined the effects of a number of interventions aimed at improving the education of African Caribbean boys in London boroughs. It found that the teaching and development of study skills, such as revision techniques, essay writing and problem solving, was important, particularly when integrated with strategies aimed at countering alienation.

Supporting students in self-regulation, providing feedback and helping them highlight progress was found to be especially important among remedial readers and other students with special educational needs. Studies in the review found that using independent learning approaches enabled teachers to organise a wider range of activities in their classrooms and to focus more on teaching and learning than on organization or behaviour. For example it enabled teachers to work with specific groups while other groups worked independently.

Two studies suggested that students who are independent learners work to higher standards, are more motivated and have higher self-esteem than other children. The students develop skills that help them further their own learning by using their own ideas to form opinions; solving problems and using a range of strategies in their learning.

What skills did students need?

There are a number of skills that students needed to acquire in order to engage successfully in independent learning:

- Cognitive skills: such as being able to construct informal rules for solving problems; classify objects according to given criteria; form hypotheses; and reason logically. The review authors suggested that these skills were important for creating ‘learner readiness’. An early years study cited in the review

concluded that by the age of seven, with the right assistance, students are generally able to hold an internal dialogue using 'thinking language'.

- **Metacognitive skills:** the review found evidence that Year 6 students were able to describe how they learn, and to identify key activities essential for learning such as listening, remembering, applying previously learnt knowledge and using formal strategies. One group of students specifically referred to the 'look, cover, write, check' strategy. Other studies highlighted the importance of students being able to reflect on what they had done, monitor their progress and use self-assessment in order to take responsibility for their own learning.

- **Affective skills:** these skills are related to managing feelings. Studies in the review identified motivation as the most important affective attribute in relation to independent learning. One study suggested that another important affective skill, which is related to motivation, is 'delay of gratification'. This refers to the ability to wait for achievement outcomes.

Some advantages of being an independent learner:

Creativity

Creativity will play better in the mind of an independent learner than the dependent one. This is because one has a chance to apply new and enjoy various ways that will help them learn easily. Creative ways of learning helps individuals acquire their own learning style. It will allow the learner to identify the best way in which they can learn affectively, applying new and old skills for learning. An independent learner will apply and discover new and innovative ways of researching and gathering information to help them with their learning. Creativity will also be seen through using visual images as well as writing notes can help with capturing your thoughts and ideas in different ways.

Ability to present good social skills

An independent learner also gets a chance to practice proper social skills and the ability to affectively work and communicate with others. Having good social skills provides the independent learner with a chance to debate and exchange ideas and challenge theories and viewpoints in an assertive way. An independent learner is able to work with others, offering and exchanging different ideas of learning.

Collectively working with others will enables the learner to enhance his understanding of a subject as well as reassuring the learner at times when they are feeling overwhelmed. Sharing ideas of how to manage with studying and other responsibilities also allows the learner to gain new innovative ways of juggling their work. Independent learners allow being constructively criticised, listening and observing what is being said and ask questions if necessary. By

understanding what kind of learner you are and then identifying the strengths and weaknesses in this, an independent learner can easily identify areas of weakness and apply other strategies that will help overcome barriers.

In addition to the above advantages an independent learner may also apply the CREAM strategy to their studies. The CREAM strategy means Creative, Reflective, Active and Motivated. These strategies help the student in becoming more aware of his or her individual learning styles as well as applying and discovering new ideas, being creative and imaginative whilst learning, which keeps their minds stimulated and interested in their studies.

Self-Evaluation and Monitoring

It is very important for one to assess personal progress during learning. This is much easier for the independent learner than the other type of learner. This is because one is able to consistently self-evaluate his or her own performance by use of different strategies to help them monitor their progress. Independent learners may use personal journals or carry out self-evaluations, as well as using feedback from tutors and peers to identify areas in which they need to develop further. This helps the learner to quickly manage areas of weakness, and apply strategies to overcome this, as well as identifying their strengths. This approach allows the learner to be in complete control of their learning and development.

There are many advantages of being an independent learner. An independent learner is actively engaged in the entire process of learning and developing. An independent learner takes a keen interest in their studies and will take an active role in ensuring that they reach their aims and objectives. Being an independent learner as opposed to a passive learner is more likely to succeed in their studies. Passive learners take little or no responsibility in their learning and development. They are often known as learners who memorise information rather than understanding what they are learning. Passive learners will always use surface learning and will not process in a productive manner, which will distract them from their studies and they may become easily bored and disinterested in what they are learning. Passive learners are often ill prepared for lectures and are unable to actively contribute to group discussions and debates. Due to their passiveness and laid back attitude towards learning they are more likely to miss deadlines and underachieve.

Increased confidence

Independent learning will not only meet a person's full academic potential, but will also be dedicated to his learning and developing themselves as individuals. Independent learning understands and takes the key skills that are required to become successful in their journey of learning. This demonstrates

that by being an active and independent learner one will not only gain respect of tutors and peers, but will also be making their own success.

Disadvantages of Self-Learning

Working in teams would allow greater teamwork and improve brainstorming. Most workers have less work because of the expanded life-enriching options they have access to.

When there are two or three individuals collaborating on a problem, it makes for greater coordination with team members. It also helps them to cooperate and work together in order to work through a problem or complete a challenging mission.

Self Managed Learning is a bit limited in terms of team collaboration or working together. Let's see in details what could be the drawbacks of self-learning below:

1) It can be difficult to stay motivated: When you are self-studying, you are responsible for your own learning. This can be a challenge if you do not find the material interesting or if you find it difficult to stay motivated.

2) It can be difficult to know when you are ready to move on: When you are self-studying, it can be difficult to know when you are ready to move on to the next topic or level. This means that you may need to spend a lot of time on a particular topic before you feel ready to move on.

3) You cannot get help from teachers: When you are self-studying, you cannot get help from teachers. If you have questions or need advice, you will need to find another source of information.

4) You need to be disciplined: When you are self-studying, you need to be disciplined in order to study regularly and stay on track. This can be a challenge if you do not have a lot of self-motivation.

See? While self-learning is wonderful, it still requires your full attention and discipline in order to get successful results in your work.

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