

PROMOTING ACTIVE LEARNING AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS AT BARRIA-VUNG TAU UNIVERSITY (BVU)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students at BVU are learning inside and outside the classroom and how satisfied students are with their current learning methods. Students' learning results when applying their current learning styles were also examined. On the other hand, the study explored the potential and essential aspects of the active learning method which the students at BVU need to be promoted. Finally, the author, depending on findings from the data, would have suggestions and recommendations on learning, participation and engagement for students with the aim of supporting students accessing to a much more effective learning method, active learning.

Keywords: Active learning, learning methods (ways, styles), learning results.

INTRODUCTION

Background and the statement of problem

In the developed world with the high standards of living, the more knowledgeable people are, the more opportunities they have to get self-actualization. Education becomes one of the value measures people's success. At present time, along with explosion of information technology, there are more and more things people need to know and learn. To understand an issue or a problem, people might search for related documents and study about them. However, because of a large number of information, people have to ask themselves how to collect and perceive knowledge fastest but most effectively. It is essential for all students to be cognitive in what they are figuring out and active to search for information sources as well as ask someone for help. While having someone help, people have to demonstrate that they are serious in studying and they know how to learn actively: spending others' time the least but getting the most. Although consulting the other people for the answer is one of common ways to solve the questions and problems, it is not all people who tend to do this actively. Some students are actually interested in what they need to learn, but another large numbers of them still have a tendency to learn passively. Like the way majority of students study at schools, they frequently take their seats and listen to the teachers without concern about what they are hearing and learning. As a result, they are afraid of discussing or interchanging lessons with others, which creates a habit of unconfident and passive learning style.

In fact, majority of BVU's students still have the habit of listening to lecturers without confirming if they understand the lessons or not, which is one of the reasons leading to the dropout of school of some students because they are not interested in what they are learning. It is extremely essential to encourage them to find out and apply a more active way in process of learning so that they are excited about the knowledge they would like to know. Therefore, this study is researched with the hope of being useful for the readers who are looking for an effective learning way.

The conceptions of terms of active learning

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their

daily lives", (W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, *American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*, 1987).

Aims of the study

With the aim of creating a favorable opportunity for myself to study about active learning and its positive effects as well as stimulate students to be more flexible while learning, this paper is conducted. Specifically, the main purpose of this study is that throughout a survey done at BVU about how students learn, the author will enable to find out some reasons and barriers that prevent students at BVU from applying active learning style instead of passive listening as traditional way.

The delimitations and limitations of the study

As far as active learning is concerned, the author firstly did not study to other aspects of learning methods such as 'passive learning' because of the learning way is too complex to deal with within the time frame allotted for carrying out this study. Secondly, this thesis was done at BVU's students with the involvement of 120 first-year and second-year students of six different majors. Finally, the questionnaire was only divided into 5 criterias, consisting of 6 questions about self-studying, 11 questions about learning method, 2 questions about extra curriculum, 3 questions about learning objectives and 4 questions about use of information technology and library to aid learning process. The researcher hoped that the results of the thesis could be adapted for other students at this university, those who faced to similar problems with learning methods.

METHODOLOGY

In order to find out learning styles that majority of students at Ba Ria Vung Tau university have been applying during their learning process, how satisfied they are with their learning outcomes and current learning methods as well as whether they are ready for new active learning way if they find it inappropriate with the strategies for their learning, this study investigated how students learn and if they are learning in active ways. In addition, the study compared students from different faculties and majors about their perceptions and methods for learning. This study employed a descriptive approach. Quantitative data was collected through a survey on students at university level. Details of the methodology are described in the following sections: Research questions, Research Design and Procedures, Participants, and Instruments.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the ensuing questions:

1. How do students learn?
2. If they study well, do they study in active ways?
3. Are they satisfied with their current learning methods and learning outcomes?

To answer question 3, the author designs five hypotheses (H0) given out and tested in this study as below:

H1. If the students are good at self-studying, then they are satisfied with their learning results.

H2. If the students have good learning methods, then they are satisfied with their learning outcomes.

H3. If the students actively and proactively take part in extra curriculums and contests, then they are satisfied with their learning results.

H4. If the students identify specific learning objectives, then they are satisfied with their learning results.

H5. If the students use information technology tools and libraries to support their learning, then they are satisfied with their learning results.

Research Design

This study was a descriptive research design. The study was conducted at Ba Ria Vung Tau University, which has an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students of 10 different faculties and more than 400 lecturers and personnel. However, the study was only designed as a cross-sectional investigation, in which 120 students of freshmen, sophomore and junior from 6 majors were randomly chosen by the surveyor who is not the author.

The characteristics of the participants

The participants for this study were 120 students of six different majors (16.6% out of each major) at BVU, including Business English; Financial Accounting; Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management; Electricity – Electronics, Food Technology; and Oriental Studies. They consisted of freshman, sophomore and junior students from the above majors.

Specifically, there were 20 junior students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Business English major, 20 freshman students of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management major, 20 sophomore students of Financial Accounting major, 20 junior students of Electricity – Electronics major, 20 sophomore students of Food Technology, and 20 junior students of Oriental Study major, participating in this survey.

Data Collection Procedures

Students were invited to take part in the survey via random choice of the surveyor, who had been hired by the author before implementing the survey at BVU. These samples were representatives for different students of different majors and different academic year.

Instruments

The participants completed 26 questions of 5 aspects related to active learning styles. The 26 multiple - choice items were designed to measure efficiency of the learning methods of students at BVU as well as their learning results. The survey consisted of 5 separate aspects of active learning, which was based on the research questions, relevant literature, previous experiments and the researcher's experiences. Five categories mentioned in the survey included self - studying, learning method, extra curriculum activities, learning objectives and use of technical tools and library. The author focused on the above categories because there were a large number of researchers who had done studies about active learning styles and strategies pointed out these aspects are tightly relevant and have close relationship with the way how students learn in an active way. Therefore, the answer of each question was considered a mirror to reflect their learning methods and their satisfaction with the learning way they are applying at university level. All the students chosen to participate in the survey responded to the questions anonymously. Also, Vietnamese versions were delivered to the participants or their best understanding possibility. The results of the questionnaire will be shown and analyzed in chapter four.

Questionnaire and its answers

The table below presents the questions and answers which will classify the learning methods students are following and applying during their learning process. Whether they are active learners or non-active learners.

Table 3.1 Survey items

CATEGORY	ITEMS	QUESTIONS	ACTIVE EARNING	NON-ACTIVE LEARNING
<i>Self-studying</i>	1	How often do you actively prepare for the lessons before class?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
		(1) Always		
		(2) Usually		
		(3) Sometimes		
	2	How do you often review the lessons for mid - term and final tests?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
		(1) Always review the lessons during the whole learning process		
(2) Sometimes review the lessons while learning				
(3) Review when the date of the test is coming.				
3	Do you often read the extra materials related to your major and subjects?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)	
	(1) Always			
	(2) Usually			
	(3) Sometimes			
4	When having troubles in doing homework, what will you do?	(1), (2)	3	
	(1) Search for more information and solve the problems by yourself			
	(2) Ask teachers or friends for a help			
	(3) Skip the problems			
5	How many hours a day do you spend to learn?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)	
	(1) More than 4 hours			
	(2) 3 – 4 hours			
	(3) 1 – 2 hours			
6	Do you choose the subjects to learn?	1	2	
	(1) No. Focusing on all subjects.			
<i>Learning method</i>	7	When discussing in groups, how do you share your ideas?	1	(2), (3), (4)
		(1) Usually share your ideas and discuss with partners in group.		
		(2) Follow the majority's opinion		
		(3) Sometimes share your ideas when being asked		
		(4) Share no ideas		

8	During the lesson, if you have not understood a problem, do you take notes in your notebook to ask teacher later or look for more information at home? (1) Yes (2) No	1	2
9	Do you schedule for your learning? (1) Yes. I always follow my schedule (2) Yes. But I do not usually follow my schedule (3) I sometimes follow my schedule (4) No. I just follow my school's schedule	1	(2), (3), (4)
10	During the class, how do you take notes the content of the lessons? (1) Write down all of the information the lecturers offer (2) Take note the main contents and ask questions if not understanding (3) Focus on listening to the lecturers carefully to remember the lessons without taking any note (4) Sometimes not focus on the lessons and not take notes	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
11	Do you prefer the teachers organizing some group activities in the class rather than listening the lectures passively? (1) Really like (2) Like (3) Unlike (4) Really unlike	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
12	What type of the lesson do you like? (1) Theory (2) Practice and mindset (3) Actuality (4) Both theory and practice	(2), (4)	(1), (3)
13	In your opinion, what is learning? (1) Go to school and listen to the lecturers (2) Learn a lot of theories (3) Learn theories and practice (4) Practice	3	(1), (2), (4)
14	When the lectures make questions, what will you do? (1) Think of the answer and raise your hand to answer (2) Know the answer but not raise your hand (3) Wait for others' answers, no thinking (4) Answer without thinking	1	(2), (3), (4)
15	According to you, how many percentages of gained knowledge can you apply into real situations? (1) Approximately 70% - 90% (2) Approximately 50% - 70% (3) Approximately 30% - 50% (4) Less than 30%	(1), (2)	(3), (4)

	16	Are you satisfied with your current learning methods? (1) Really satisfied (2) Satisfied (3) Unsatisfied (4) Really unstaisfied	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
	17	How is your learning result when you apply the current learning method? (1) Good (2) Quite good (3) Average (4) Failing	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
Extra curriculum activities	18	With extra curriculum activities such as English Speaking Club, Camping, Quiz Tests, and so on, do you actively take part in? (1) Usually (2) Sometimes (3) Rarely (4) Never	1	(2), (3), (4)
	19	Do you actively participate in contests organized by your school or Faculty for students to learn more knowledge and skills? (1) Actively and Proactively join (2) Join when being required by the teachers (3) Join when your friends join you (4) Never join these contests	1	(2), (3), (4)
Learning objectives	20	Do you define your own learning objectives? (1) Define clearly from the beginning (2) Define but usually change (3) Not defined yet (4) Have no specific objectives	1	(2), (3), (4)
	21	Are you interested in your current major and lessons at school? (1) Really interested (2) Interested (3) Not interested (4) Not clear	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
	22	Do you really like going to school? (1) Really like (2) Like (3) Unlike (4) Really unlike	(1), (2)	(3), (4)

<i>Use of technical tools and library</i>	23	How often do you use information technology tools for your self – studying?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
		(1) Always		
		(2) Usually		
		(3) Sometimes		
	24	What kinds of online websites do you often choose to learn?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
		(1) Attending online courses with copyright (with fees)		
		(2) Attending free online courses		
		(3) Reading all related information without selection		
	25	How often do you go to library to learn and look for more information?	(1), (2)	(3), (4)
		(1) Always		
		(2) Usually		
		(3) Sometimes		
	26	What kinds of library do you choose?	(1), (2)	3
		(1) Electronic library		
		(2) Paper library		
		(3) Unknown		

Data Analysis

The author used Analyze Scale function of SPSS to calculate Cronbach's alpha, the measure of reliability, for the survey items. A reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered "acceptable" in most social science research situations. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these 26 items in the author's survey is .832, which is higher than .70, expressing that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

Table 3.2. Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics
Cronbach's alpha
.832

In order to answer the first research question, frequencies and percentages were calculated for each of questions in section two and four of the survey. The percentages indicated the amount of students who are interesting in their current learning method and satisfied with their learning results. Mean and standard deviations were also calculated for each question in order to reveal learning trend of majority of students at BVU.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Answer the research questions

How do students learn?

A great number of students revealed that they are actually interested in their majors as well as satisfied with the learning method they are applying. Students know how to take advantages

of technology during learning process. They have used websites and online courses to obtain more knowledge and exchange information about the lessons.

On the other side, these students also express their interests in extracurricular activities and contests held by the school or faculties even though they need encouragement or even obligatory from the other people before making decision of registering in these activities. Besides, students show that they usually try to make their knowledge clearer and more accurate by actively and proactively ask their instructors for more explanation or themselves search for information on the Internet or in the library in order to understand the confusing issues in depth.

The data from the survey also indicated that students at BVU sometimes read through the lessons before class but they have not written down main contents or problems they do not understand so that they are able to have an overview of what they are going to learn. In addition, students still have a perception of minor and core subjects, which means that they (55.8%) have tendency to learn only subjects related to their majors while other subjects also play important roles during their learning process and future career.

Another prominent thing of how students at BVU learn is that they have set their own learning objectives and also specific learning schedule from the beginning of their studying at university yet they usually make a change of these objectives or timetable, which leads students to be confused of their learning purposes and learning methods.

In the classroom and during the lessons, students frequently make notes of the contents explained and presented by the instructors. When working in groups to discuss about the lessons as well as deal with difficult problems together, students are usually afraid of sharing their own opinions or contribute new ideas in order to complete the tasks given out by the lecturers and understand the lessons much better. Furthermore, students are also not confident in expressing their answers to the questions the teachers ask. A lot of students do not raise hands to give their thinking about what being asked.

If they study well, do they study in active ways?

According to information collected from the survey, students at BVU have reached the great learning results. However, on balance, depending on the survey, students at BVU have not been absolutely study well. What students have performed during their learning process pointed out that they have not had specific and effective learning method for themselves.

The authors of more recent studies have proposed that active learning way consists of several aspects, including effective self-studying, specific learning objectives, actively participating in extracurricular activities and using technical tools in studying. The quantitative data showed that students are currently using technology to support their learning in a lot of situations, even they have used electrical library to find out more information. However, a wide range of students have not been used of self-studying, especially preparation before class and exams. In addition, students also do not follow specific and constant objectives but change frequently. Therefore, their learning method may be fluctuated because of changeable learning purposes, which might make students not active in learning process.

In conclusion, students at BVU seem to have gradually accessed to active learning method. Likewise, students need to be further encouraged and promoted in order to apply active learning ways in their studying effectively.

Are they satisfied with their current learning methods and learning outcomes?

Depending on Sig. (2-tailed) and Pear Correlation of each sector mentioned in the study, the author is able to analyze correlation of hypothesis.

Table. 3.3.3.1. Hypothesis (H0)

Correlations		Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
			N=120
(A)	Self-studying (A1)	.333**	0.000
Are you satisfied with your current learning methods and learning result?	Learning methods (A2)	.578**	0.0338
	Extra curriculums activities (A3)	.321**	0.0606
	Learning objectives (A4)	.354**	0.042
	Use information technology tools and libraries (A5)	.334**	0.0465

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

For the hypothesis, the correlation between A and A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 variables is 0.3. This means that there is a rather weak relationship between two variables. This means that changes in one variable are weakly correlated with changes in the other variable. Also, the Sig.(2tailed) index between A and A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 is less than .05. The author can conclude that there is a statistically significant correlations between A and A1, A2, A3, A4, A5. It does mean that if students do well A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, they will be satisfied with their current learning method as well as reach the learning outcomes as they expect.

DISCUSSION

The data implies that students have differences in their learning methods as well as their learning outcomes. The data also that students at BVU are currently performing educational tasks effectively even though they also have several barriers and misconceptions of applying active learning method. Especially, the findings also indicates the difference between satisfaction level of students about their current learning method and learning results they have achieve at school. These differences have resulted in application of active learning style that may be relevant for obtaining high quality learning results. Students have increasingly adopted active learning method for educational purposes. Without reminder of instructors, students themselves have found out learning way that have helped them gain lesson content and acquire related knowledge. Specifically, students have actively in their learning objectives in order to achieve what they have been taught in class.

With the purpose of measuring average rate of total responses and learning trends of the participants, the author implemented to analyze mean of whole answers by One – Sample T-Test. If the mean is one, considered a complete active learning, two an active learning, and three or four non-active learning. The analysis results as the below table showed that mean of using technical tools and library category (2.263) was the highest, followed by extra curriculum activities (2.258), self-studying (2.244), learning method (2.186) and learning objectives (1.914). These figures expressed the real situations of students at Ba Ria Vung Tau

university. Although students set good learning objectives, they didn't totally enforce these goals.

Table 3.4.1. One – Sample T Test

	N	Mean	Sig.	Std.
			(2-tailed)	Deviation
Self-studying	120	2.244	0	0.4184
Learning methods	120	2.186	0.0338	0.3702
Extra curriculums	120	2.258	0.0606	0.6642
Learning objectives	120	1.914	0.042	0.4604
Use of technical tools and library	120	2.263	0.0465	0.5092

Sections students at BVU are good at

According to the analyzed results in One – Sample Test table as above, it is proved that students at BVU are good at setting learning objectives. They showed their activeness in identifying specific learning goals from the beginning of studying at university level. “Being in a classroom without knowing the direction for learning is similar to taking a purposeless trip to an unfamiliar city” (Ceri B. Dean, Elizabeth Ross Hubbell, Howard Pitler and Bj Stone). Setting specific and clear learning objectives from the beginning of learning process is considered the most significant if students would like to achieve high results in studying at university level. However, students at BVU through the survey expressed that they have not totally concentrated on setting learning goals.

Sections that students are not good at

Students reported that they are lack of building appropriate learning methods. Learning method is an educational process teaching students how to explore, understand and solve the problems and issues of their studying. Once students apply appropriate learning method, they will be gain more useful knowledge effectively. The data revealed that even though students at BVU have specific learning methods, they do not entirely follow those learning ways. Students seem to still have the habit of depending on their teachers' instructions instead of being self-awareness of what they need to gain according to active learning method. as well as building an effective and suitable learning method for studying their majors for a long time, which could be due to their learning habits from high school.

The data revealed that the way students at BVU spend their time on self-studying was not effective. They are not truly aware of how self-studying could impact their learning process and results because of the fact that a large majority of students at BVU responded that they sometimes prepared for the lessons before going to class as well as they do not spend too much time on finding out and reading more reference books so that they can improve their knowledge and understand the lessons in depth.

Another field of active learning method analyzed in the study is how frequent students at BVU participate in extracurricular activities. The average rate of students who have dropped out school in the United States is about 10%. (Casinger, 2011). Meanwhile, students who take part in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to reach greater academic achievement because of the fact that they are engaged during learning process. Erin Massoni also mentioned usefulness of extracurricular activities on students on her article, The Positive Effects of Extra Curricular Activities on Students. Participating in extracurricular

activities allows students to learn a lot of essential lessons and skills for their learning at university as well as future studying and working

In fact, together with technique development and variety of kinds of library, students have more and more opportunities and options to study at flexible time. According to Ashley Wainwright, a Marketing Coordinator at SecurEdge Networks, integrating technology in education everyday helps students stay engaged. Today's students love technology so they are sure to be interested in learning if they can use the tools they love. As John Page (Tech Learning e-magazine, March 2007) said, information technology will become a "private tutor" supporting students to explore interesting lessons rather than make students confused in a large class. Besides, selection of using information technology allows students expand their knowledge through attending online courses as well as interact with other people around the globe. Therefore, they have opportunities in order to learn new great things, especially understand other cultures through direct conversation and collaboration, which creates more interest in learning from educational viewpoint.

Current learning method satisfaction and learning achievements comparison

Most of the quantitative data from the survey pointed out that more than a half of students (57.5%) are currently satisfied with their learning method. However, learning results students have obtained during learning process are at average level (approximately 42% of the total) and under average level (approximately 14% of the whole). The data also indicated that the amount of students who do not take satisfaction in the way they have been learning at university accounted for nearly 38% of the total, yet nearly 50% of the entire students stated they have achieved good results during learning process. This revealed there is an inconsistency between learning method satisfaction and learning achievements.

It is possible due to most of these students are following a learning way which is not enough effective. Although students are satisfied with their current learning method, it does not mean the learning method they are applying bring a high result. On the other hand, students may not totally follow the learning method they have built in order to gain the most efficiency. Besides, the reality shows that requirements for entering BVU are at an average extent compared with a lot of universities in the country. Hence, majority of students at BVU have not truly concentrated effective learning methods in order to enable reach the highest results according to their abilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

All in all, the survey results indicate that students at BVU have accessed to active learning style at university level. The students have take full advantages of information technology development and electronic library in order to enhance their understanding and search for more information about the lessons as well as gain new knowledge essential and useful for learning and working in the future.

All of the findings about learning objectives to the fact that students at BVU make sense of identifying learning objectives from the beginning of learning process. There are 90% of these students have set their learning goals as soon as starting studying at university. However, the number of students who keep following their objectives is not much. More than 50% of the total students usually skip the initial objectives when beginning their learning

process although they had built these targets before. Therefore, students may be confused of what they need to focus and achieve while learning, which makes students non-active in learning inside and outside classroom.

The data also pointed out how frequently students at BVU take part in outdoors activities as well as contests held by the faculties. More than 90% of students usually participate in these kinds of activities. However, these students have still been encouraged or obliged. A large number of students (67.5%) only join these activities and contests when their friends join them or their teachers ask them for participation.

The findings allow the author to conclude that students at BVU do not absolutely concentrated on self-studying outside classroom. Sixty percent of students have not well prepared before class or tests. They also do not spend much time on referring extra materials in order to expand their knowledge outside school.

Depending on the quantitative data, the author is able to come to the conclusion that each student at BVU are not applying a specific learning way because they usually change the learning schedule they have set or even they do not follow what they have planned for their studying. The number of these students accounts for more than 80% of the whole. Besides, the way students learn showed their lack of confidence and activeness in class because they do not frequently share their ideas in group discussion.

Finally, students show their frequency in learning through using information technology. Students, approximately 70% of the total, also make use of network development by attending online courses on the websites. Yet the way students select information to learn on the Internet pointed out that they have applied a non-active learning method because of the fact that they read all of the information they have found instead of carefully selecting reliable information from well-known websites. On the other hand, library, considered as a valuable information source, is less used in order to search for more information. However, more than 70% of the total rarely or even never comes to the library for learning purposes.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study as well as previous theories and research papers about active learning, the following suggestions are offered to support the students at BVU in promoting strategies for active learning method.

For the students

- Students should establish a small group of classmates who would like to exchange information exchange notes, quiz each other, and most importantly, hold each other responsible for showing up to each session so that they can improve and make sure of their knowledge as well as support each other in learning. Group learning will help increase the excitement and encourage students to be more confident in the lessons.

- Students may think about applying POWER method, designed by Professor Robert Feldman from Massachusetts university. POWER stands for Prepare, Organize, Work, Evaluate and Rethink. These steps play important roles in following active learning method effectively.

- Library of the university is a valuable information source. Therefore, students should fully exploit this useful resource of information to enhance their understandings by frequently going to the school's library.

- In order to be able to achieve great results in learning, students need to set up specific objectives for their learning process as soon as making the decision of learning their majors at university so that they are going to make plan to reach the goals.

- Students should have another perception of participating extracurricular activities and voluntarily take part in these kinds of activities instead of being forced by other agents. Extracurricular activities are favorable conditions for students to learn in a more exciting environment.

For the university

The author suggests that the university can open its own learning forums or websites as a mutual home for students at BVU so that they can access to the courses designed and instructed by the teaching staff from all of the Faculties at the school. In addition, students also facilitate to exchange the contents of the lessons, homework or any assignments as well as ask about what they have not understood in the lessons because of time limited. Instructors are able to support students at different time and different places. Besides, this kind of learning could make students more excited about online learning.

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