

THE NEED TO IMPROVE TEACHING METHODS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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1. Situation

Few teachers have been interested in teaching students in learning methods so far, especially in self-learning ones. Students usually go to classroom for some knowledge instead of ways to do research on their own. Many people are of the opinion that the poor sensitivity of students has become a threat to many universities, including the famous ones. In many universities today, students try to gather and swallow knowledge instead of sharpening it or learning research methods while teachers give them everything but self-learning methods and creative thinking.

When students are filled with concepts, formulas and all kinds of information from textbooks, they usually become dull and have no ability to think independently. In addition, they get into a habit of learning lesson passively. Only a few of them could raise a question for their teachers. At present, it's very sad to say that all students have poor knowledge of basic sciences, make a lot of spelling mistakes and don't know how to present any topic.

As for teachers, improving teaching methods is matter of life and death but only a few of them engage in this effort.

All sciences and subjects are interesting if lecturers know how to present them. Regrettably, their obsolete or inappropriate teaching methods make students bored. Most lecturers in class only dictate to their students or sit down and speak from beginning to end.

Students in all universities spend too much time on foreign language and computing and less time on their major subjects. Their timetable is usually unreasonable because many lessons are given in evenings with the result that they couldn't attend class regularly.

Most students have no confidence in their ability at school and after graduation as well because they know nothing about methods of doing researches or what they should do to master their subjects. They tend to review lessons when exams are around the corner.

2. Some opinions from lecturers

- Education is a service that requires improvements in its quality. The tuition fee must be high enough to encourage teachers to make necessary efforts.

- Quality of the teaching methods adopted by lecturers must be evaluated in terms of their motivation and discipline. Their living standard must be ensured so they can devote themselves to their career.

- Teachers only give lessons according to preset programs, therefore textbooks and research materials for students must be standardized, which help teachers provide students with necessary and basic knowledge.



Photo by Huỳnh Thọ

Even ways of giving and marking exams need standardization.

- Time allocated to each subject is not sufficient, which forces teachers to reduce the amount of knowledge presented in class in order to give more exercises to students.

- Teachers need good working conditions that make them feel comfortable. Teaching aids must be in good conditions so teachers need not spend time on preparing or repairing them before starting their lessons. Universities must be considered as organizers. If organizers work badly, teachers will quit teaching.

- Improvements in teaching methods may go against university statutes. Results of exams at the school year's end are still of the greatest importance. To legalize new teaching methods requires the university directorate to change its statutes.

- The university must trust lecturers to direct students in scientific researches.

3. Measures to apply to teachers

- Teachers should have enough knowledge and skills. Lecturers need teaching fellows who take discussion or practical classes.

- Lecturers had better engage in scientific researches, and write textbooks and reference books of high quality, or cooperate with others to do so if need be.

- Working or learning is compulsory. If teachers themselves don't provide students with knowledge, they can force students to do researches on their own under teachers' direction. Students' works could be marked on a regular basis or in exams at the year's end. If teachers couldn't force students to do so, they are producing graduates with some qualification but no knowledge and skills. Teachers also have to do their researches and continuously improve their knowledge and skills. When giving lectures, they had better train students in studying methods and introduce necessary reference books.

- Teachers, especially young ones, should love their career, and accept initial difficulties and challenges. They should develop their sensitivity and feel bored when teaching methods haven't been improved and students become passive and rely too much on teachers. They should also be alert to topical problems, which encourages them to look for the new and try to meet demands by students.

- Teachers must be responsible for what they teach in class and give

the same lecture regardless of the number of students. They should stop dictating their lessons. Sometimes, they should invest time in studying new software, such as Power Point, and encourage students do the same. To use some punishment along with persuasion is also useful when helping students do researches.

- University governing body had better organize workshops on scientific subjects for young lecturers, invite speakers from successful companies and organize after-school activities (making visiting tours to factories for example). In addition, international cooperation and seminars could help encourage scientific researches among teachers and students.

4. Measures to apply to students

- Self-learning habit: This is the backbone of students' studies in universities. It shapes a learning way in which students know how to overcome difficulties and make studies on their own by making the most of training programs and help from, instead of relying totally on, their teachers. They could turn self-learning skills into a habit in all processes of training and gathering knowledge. Moreover, they could know how to challenges accepted concepts and knowledge. As Tạ Quang Bửu, a famous professor, put it, "The self-learning habit helps each person become himself/herself rather than a copy or shadow of others. This habit will become a principal part of personal competence and

reflect essence and nature of the learner."

- POWER self-learning method: This method is introduced by Professor Robert Feldman from Massachusetts University to help freshmen acquire an effective learning method. POWER is an abbreviation of five words representing five basic factors for learners:

- + Prepare: The learning process should be started by efforts to gather materials and read them before lecturers present the subject in classroom.

- + Organize: Students should organize their learning process systematically.

- + Work: Students should listen to the lecturer, take notes, engage in discussions and do exercises as required.

- + Estimate: Students could estimate themselves before being estimated by teachers. By doing so, they will know where they are and how to make progress.

- + Rethink: Rethinking of what they learn will help students improve their learning method and results of study. Moreover, it encourages creativity and allows them to find new approaches to problems or subjects.

To reform teaching and learning methods in university requires only time, money and energy from universities but also reforms in secondary education. And no reform could take place when the teaching and learning process in universities is passive and obsolete. ■

