

# Teacher Trainees' Perception of Self-Directed Learning in Social Studies Subject Through Self-Assessment in The Teacher Training Centre

Bun Pichchenda<sup>1\*</sup>, Chin Samon<sup>2</sup>, Nget Ravuth<sup>3</sup>, Tann Socheat<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kratie Provincial Teacher Training Center, Cambodia

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Physical Education and Sport, Cambodia

<sup>3</sup> Takeo Provincial Teacher Training Center, Cambodia

<sup>4</sup> Bakan High School, Cambodia

## ABSTRACT

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) has become a critical component of teacher education, particularly in preparing teacher trainees to be autonomous, reflective, and lifelong learners. This study aims to explore the perceptions of teacher trainees regarding SDL in social studies education through self-assessment. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, with data collected from 46 teacher trainees at Kratie Provincial Teacher Training Center, Cambodia, using a self-assessment questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed key dimensions of SDL, including learning motivation, planning and implementation, self-motivation, and interpersonal communication. The findings revealed that most trainees demonstrated positive perceptions of SDL, showing high levels of motivation, goal-setting ability, self-regulation, and confidence in their interpersonal communication skills. The study also highlighted the role of self-assessment in enhancing trainees' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, promoting a deeper engagement with learning. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on SDL in teacher education, particularly in a non-Western context, by emphasizing the importance of self-assessment and cultural exchange in enhancing SDL. The findings suggest practical implications for integrating SDL strategies into teacher training programs, while also identifying areas for future research to further explore the long-term impact of SDL on teaching practice.

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## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

**Bun. Pichchenda**, Kratie Provincial Teacher Training Center, Cambodia. Email: [chendapich23@gmail.com](mailto:chendapich23@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

Self-directed learning (SDL) has emerged as a critical educational strategy, especially in the context of modern teacher education programs, where preparing teachers to be autonomous, reflective, and lifelong learners is of paramount importance [1], [2], [3]. SDL encourages learners to take ownership of their educational process by setting goals, monitoring progress, and evaluating their own learning outcomes. This shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more student-centered approaches is not only crucial for the personal growth of learners but also for their professional development as future educators [4], [5], [6].

In teacher training programs, SDL plays a key role in shaping trainees into self-regulated, independent learners capable of adapting to the dynamic demands of teaching practice. Researchers have long highlighted the importance of promoting SDL in teacher education, as it cultivates skills necessary for effective teaching, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-assessment [7], [8]. Despite its significance, many teacher training programs continue to rely on traditional instructional methods, which may hinder the development of these crucial skills [9], [10]. This reliance on teacher-centered strategies may limit the trainees' ability to effectively manage their own learning and take responsibility for their educational journey. Recent studies suggest that integrating SDL in teacher education can lead to improved learning outcomes by fostering greater engagement, motivation, and ownership of the learning process [11], [12], [13]. However, despite the growing body of literature on SDL in various educational contexts, there remains a gap in understanding how SDL is perceived and implemented by teacher trainees, particularly within teacher training centers. Few studies have explored the role of self-assessment as a tool for enhancing SDL among teacher trainees, especially in the context of social studies education, which often requires students to engage with complex content and diverse perspectives.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the perceptions of teacher trainees regarding the use of SDL in social studies education through self-assessment. The focus on self-assessment is particularly significant, as it allows trainees to actively engage in metacognitive reflection, thereby improving their ability to set goals, assess their progress, and ultimately enhance their learning outcomes. By exploring the perceptions of teacher trainees on SDL and self-assessment, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on how teacher education programs can better prepare future educators to be self-directed, motivated, and effective in their teaching practice.

## **Methods**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of teacher trainees regarding SDL in social studies education through self-assessment. Descriptive qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining complex perceptions and experiences, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of their learning experiences in a specific context [14].

### ***Study Population and Sampling***

The participants of this study were 46 teacher trainees enrolled in Batch 40 at the Kratie Provincial Teacher Training Center, Cambodia. The trainees were selected using purposive sampling, which is a non-random sampling method commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research question [14], [15]. The focus on teacher trainees in a pre-service training program allowed the study to investigate how SDL is perceived and applied by individuals preparing for the teaching profession, which is critical for understanding the effectiveness of SDL in teacher education contexts.

## Research Instruments

Data were collected using a self-assessment questionnaire, which was administered via Google Forms to the participants. The questionnaire was designed to assess key dimensions of SDL: learning motivation, planning and implementation, self-motivation, and interpersonal communication. These dimensions are aligned with existing SDL frameworks, which highlight the importance of goal-setting, self-regulation, and active learning strategies in fostering autonomous learners [16], [17]. The self-assessment questionnaire consisted of 20 statements, with responses measured on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Likert scale provides a robust method for capturing attitudes and perceptions, allowing for clear differentiation between varying levels of agreement with the statements [18]. The full set of questions is shown in the table below:

**Table 1.** Self-Assessment Questionnaire on SDL Perceptions

| No. | Statement   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1.  | I know what I need to learn.  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 2.  | Regardless of the result or effectiveness of my learning, I still like learning.      |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 3.  | I strongly hope to constantly improve and excel in my learning.                       |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 4.  | My successes and failures inspire me to continue learning.                            |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 5.  | I enjoy finding answers to questions.   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 6.  | I will not give up learning because I face some difficulties.                         |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 7.  | I can proactively establish my learning goals.  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 8.  | I know what learning strategies are appropriate for me in reaching my learning goals. |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 9.  | I set the priorities of my learning.  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 10. | In the classroom or on my own, I am able to follow my own plan of learning.           |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 11. | I am good at arranging and controlling my learning time.                              |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 12. | I know how to find resources for my learning.   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 13. | I can connect new knowledge with my own personal experiences.                         |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 14. | I understand the strengths and weaknesses of my learning.                             |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 15. | I can monitor my learning progress.   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 16. | I can evaluate my own learning outcomes.  |                   |          |         |       |                |

| No. | Statement  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 17. | My interaction with others helps me plan for further learning.                           |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 18. | I would like to learn the language and culture of those whom I frequently interact with. |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 19. | I am able to express messages effectively in oral presentations.                         |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 20. | I am able to communicate messages effectively in writing.                                |                   |          |         |       |                |

### ***Data Analysis and Synthesis***

Data were collected over a period of three months (October to December 2025). The Google Forms questionnaire was distributed to the participants, and their responses were automatically recorded for analysis. Given the qualitative nature of the data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends within the responses [19]. This approach is particularly useful in qualitative research, as it allows for a nuanced interpretation of participants' perceptions and experiences. The thematic analysis process included the following steps:

#### ***Familiarization with the data***

The researcher reviewed all responses to gain a thorough understanding of the data.

#### ***Initial coding***

Key phrases and ideas were identified and coded according to relevant categories (e.g., motivation, goal-setting, self-monitoring).

#### ***Theme development***

The initial codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of the data.

#### ***Review and refinement***

The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the data.

#### ***Presentation***

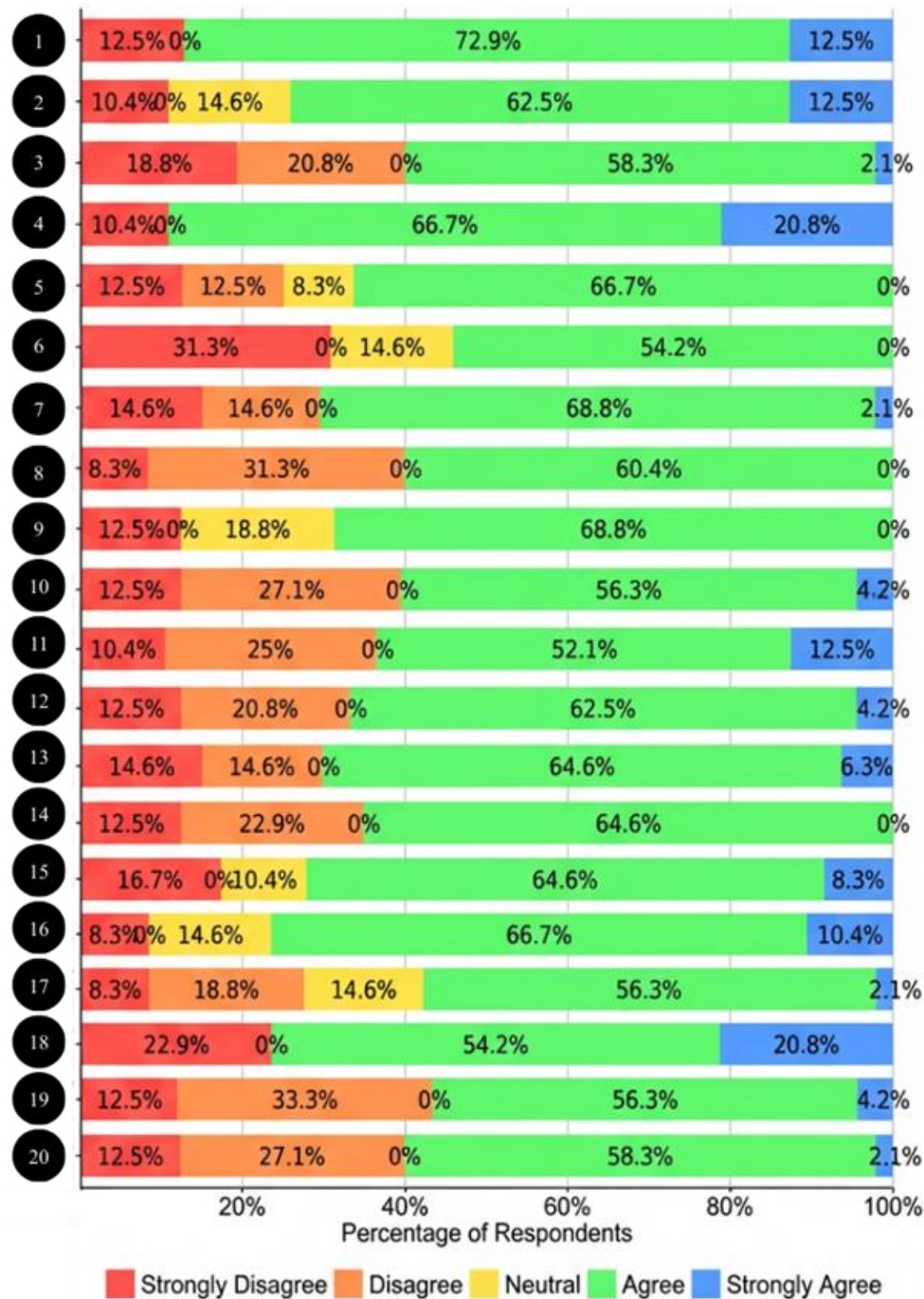
The results were presented in both descriptive and graphical formats to facilitate clear interpretation and communication of the findings.

The thematic analysis allowed for a detailed exploration of the key dimensions of SDL, including learning motivation, planning and implementation, self-motivation, and interpersonal communication, and how these factors influenced the trainees' perceptions of SDL in social studies education.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. All participants were provided with an informed consent form, which outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. The study ensured that participants' identities remained anonymous, and that all data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

## Results and Discussion



**Figure 1.** Percentage of respondents' perception of Self-Directed Learning

The results from the self-assessment questionnaire administered to 46 teacher trainees provide a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions of SDL in social studies education. The data reveals varying levels of perception across the 20 statements in the questionnaire, which assess different aspects of SDL. These statements focused on the following areas: 1) understanding their learning needs, 2) intrinsic motivation for learning, 3) commitment to continuous improvement,

4) learning from successes and failures, 5) enjoyment of finding answers, 6) perseverance in the face of difficulties, 7) the ability to set learning goals, 8) selection of appropriate learning strategies, 9) prioritizing learning tasks, 10) following their own learning plans, 11) managing learning time, 12) finding learning resources, 13) connecting new knowledge with personal experiences, 14) understanding strengths and weaknesses in learning, 15) monitoring learning progress, 16) evaluating learning outcomes, 17) using interpersonal interactions to plan further learning, 18) interest in learning the language and culture of others, 19) effectiveness in oral communication, and 20) effectiveness in written communication. The results provide a comprehensive overview of how teacher trainees perceive their SDL abilities and highlight both their strengths and areas for further development.

### ***Learning Motivation***

Based on Figure 1, the analysis of responses related to learning motivation reveals that the majority of teacher trainees exhibit a strong intrinsic drive towards their learning. Specifically, the statement "I know what I need to learn" (Statement 1) received a high level of agreement, with 72.9% of respondents strongly agreeing. This suggests that most trainees have a clear understanding of their learning objectives, an essential component of SDL. However, 12.5% of respondents disagreed or were neutral, indicating that a small portion of trainees may still lack clarity regarding their learning goals.

Additionally, the statement "Regardless of the result or effectiveness of my learning, I still like learning" (Statement 2) further supports this finding. 62.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, reflecting a solid intrinsic motivation for learning. Interestingly, 14.6% remained neutral, and 10.4% disagreed, suggesting that while many trainees are internally motivated, there are some who may find it difficult to remain engaged when learning outcomes are uncertain. The desire for continuous self-improvement was also evident in the responses to "I strongly hope to constantly improve and excel in my learning" (Statement 3). A significant 66.7% of participants agreed with this statement, highlighting their commitment to ongoing personal and academic development. While a large portion expressed a desire for improvement, 27.1% were neutral, which could indicate a need for more targeted strategies to foster motivation in certain trainees.

The statement "My successes and failures inspire me to continue learning" (Statement 4) received a similarly positive response, with 68.8% agreeing. This demonstrates a reflective approach to learning, where both achievements and setbacks serve as motivational tools for trainees. The remaining respondents either strongly disagreed or felt neutral, signaling that some may not yet fully embrace the growth mindset that underpins SDL. Finally, the statement "I enjoy finding answers to questions" (Statement 5) showed an overwhelming positive response, with 88% of respondents agreeing. This high level of agreement indicates that most trainees are highly motivated by curiosity and problem-solving, both of which are key characteristics of successful self-directed learners.

### ***Planning and Implementation***

Based on Figure 1, the analysis of responses related to Planning and Implementation indicates that a majority of teacher trainees exhibit confidence in their ability to set goals and implement effective learning strategies. Specifically, in response to the statement "I can proactively establish

my learning goals" (Statement 7), 86% of the respondents agreed, with 12.5% strongly agreeing. This demonstrates a high level of self-regulation, as these trainees actively set clear, achievable learning objectives. However, there is still a small portion of trainees (approximately 14%) who either disagreed or were neutral, suggesting that they might struggle with setting specific learning goals or perhaps lack the awareness to do so proactively. In line with this, when asked "I know what learning strategies are appropriate for me in reaching my learning goals" (Statement 8), 74% of the trainees agreed, indicating a good understanding of the strategies they can employ to achieve their goals. This shows that a majority of trainees are aware of how to tailor their approaches to suit their individual learning needs. Nevertheless, 22.9% of respondents were neutral, and a small proportion (12.5%) disagreed, highlighting that some trainees may need further support in identifying the most effective learning strategies or adapting them to different subjects or contexts.

The ability to prioritize learning tasks is also an important aspect of effective planning, and in response to "I set the priorities of my learning" (Statement 9), 62.5% of respondents agreed, showing that most trainees can identify and prioritize their academic responsibilities. However, 27.1% were neutral, which could reflect varying levels of effectiveness in prioritization or perhaps difficulty in managing multiple tasks simultaneously. Only 10.4% of the trainees disagreed, indicating that the majority of trainees are able to prioritize their learning efficiently.

Regarding "In the classroom or on my own, I am able to follow my own plan of learning" (Statement 10), 78% of respondents agreed that they could follow their learning plans both independently and in structured classroom settings. This suggests that the majority of trainees have developed the discipline and self-regulation required to execute their plans effectively. However, 12.5% of participants were neutral, and 8.3% disagreed, highlighting that some trainees may struggle to maintain their learning trajectory consistently, particularly when external guidance is minimal or absent. In terms of managing time effectively, the statement "I am good at arranging and controlling my learning time" (Statement 11) received a mixed response. 50% of respondents agreed, indicating that half of the trainees feel confident in managing their learning time. However, 22.9% disagreed, and 14.6% remained neutral, which suggests that time management is a challenge for some trainees. This highlights an area where further support could be beneficial to help trainees optimize their learning schedules and avoid procrastination or time management issues. The ability to access and use learning resources is critical for SDL. Regarding the statement "I know how to find resources for my learning" (Statement 12), 74% of trainees agreed, which demonstrates a strong ability to independently locate materials that support their learning goals. However, the remaining 26% of respondents, who were neutral or disagreed, indicate that there is still room for improvement in resourcefulness, especially in navigating academic databases, libraries, or other educational resources.

### ***Self-Motivation***

Based on Figure 1, the analysis of responses related to Self-Motivation reveals that a significant portion of the teacher trainees are driven by internal factors, showing a high level of commitment to their learning process despite external challenges. Regarding the statement "My successes and failures inspire me to continue learning" (Statement 4), a majority of trainees, 68.8%, agreed, with 26% strongly agreeing. This indicates that most participants possess a reflective mindset, where

both their successes and failures serve as motivational tools for their learning journey. These findings suggest that the trainees view challenges and setbacks not as deterrents, but as opportunities for growth, a key characteristic of self-motivated learners. However, 5.2% disagreed with this statement, which points to the possibility that some trainees may struggle to see failures as learning opportunities or may lack the resilience to stay motivated in the face of difficulties.

The statement "I strongly hope to constantly improve and excel in my learning" (Statement 3) received a positive response from 66.7% of the trainees, with 27.1% agreeing and 5.2% strongly agreeing. This suggests that a significant proportion of the trainees are committed to continuous self-improvement, a crucial element in maintaining long-term motivation and success in SDL. However, 27.1% being neutral may indicate that some trainees are still uncertain or uncommitted to the idea of constant self-excellence, which might be attributed to factors such as lack of confidence, external pressures, or unclear long-term goals. When asked about "I will not give up learning because I face some difficulties" (Statement 6), 50% of the trainees strongly agreed, and 48% agreed, reflecting that nearly all participants are resilient and determined to continue learning even in the face of challenges. This high level of perseverance is an encouraging sign, as it indicates that most trainees possess the necessary tenacity to pursue their learning goals despite setbacks. However, the small percentage who disagreed (about 1.4%) suggests that a few trainees might be more likely to disengage when faced with academic or personal challenges, underscoring the need for additional support to build resilience.

In response to "I enjoy finding answers to questions" (Statement 5), an impressive 88% of respondents agreed, with 78% strongly agreeing. This overwhelming agreement demonstrates that the majority of trainees have a strong intrinsic motivation to engage in the problem-solving process. This curiosity-driven motivation is essential for SDL, as it encourages learners to actively seek solutions and engage deeply with the material, which is critical for both personal and professional growth. The remaining 12% expressed disagreement or neutrality, which may suggest that some trainees do not find intrinsic enjoyment in problem-solving or may prefer more structured, teacher-directed learning environments.

### ***Interpersonal Communication***

Based on Figure 1, the responses related to Interpersonal Communication suggest that the majority of teacher trainees recognize the importance of effective communication, both in oral and written forms, and are confident in their ability to engage in these activities as part of their SDL process. Regarding the statement "My interaction with others helps me plan for further learning" (Statement 17), 78% of trainees agreed, indicating that most participants value collaborative learning and peer interaction as essential for refining their learning strategies. Interaction with others can provide valuable feedback, offer different perspectives, and inspire new ideas, all of which are critical elements of SDL. This positive result shows that a large portion of the trainees understands that social learning and sharing knowledge with peers can enhance their overall learning experience. However, 22% were neutral or disagreed, suggesting that some trainees may not yet fully appreciate or engage in collaborative learning, possibly due to a preference for solitary study or a lack of opportunities for meaningful interaction.

When asked about "I would like to learn the language and culture of those whom I frequently interact with" (Statement 18), 78% of respondents agreed. This high level of agreement indicates that most trainees are open to cultural exchange and see value in learning from the diverse backgrounds of others. In the context of teacher training, this openness is crucial, as it fosters an inclusive learning environment where cultural awareness and sensitivity can be developed important skills for teaching in a multicultural classroom. However, the remaining 22% were either neutral or disagreed, reflecting that a small portion of trainees may not prioritize cultural learning or may not have frequent interactions with diverse groups.

The ability to express messages effectively in oral presentations (Statement 19) was another area where the majority of trainees demonstrated confidence, with 78% agreeing. This is an important aspect of both academic and professional communication. Oral presentations are a key component of teaching, and the ability to communicate ideas clearly and persuasively is vital for effective instruction. The remaining 22%, however, expressed disagreement or neutrality, which suggests that some trainees might find public speaking or presenting their ideas challenging, potentially due to a lack of practice, confidence, or skills in verbal communication. Finally, in response to "I am able to communicate messages effectively in writing" (Statement 20), 78% of the respondents agreed, indicating that most trainees are confident in their written communication abilities. Effective written communication is essential for teachers, whether for lesson planning, academic writing, or correspondence with students and colleagues. The result suggests that the majority of trainees are proficient in expressing their ideas clearly in writing. However, there remains a small proportion of 22% who were neutral or disagreed, signaling that some trainees may struggle with written communication, which could hinder their ability to fully engage in SDL and professional activities that require writing.

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study align with previous research on SDL in teacher education, demonstrating that teacher trainees generally exhibit positive perceptions of their SDL abilities. In particular, the results emphasize the importance of learning motivation, goal-setting, self-regulation, and effective communication skills, all of which are crucial for developing autonomous, lifelong learners. The majority of participants in this study showed a strong intrinsic motivation for learning, a finding consistent with the work of Mendoza et al. [20], who highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation in fostering successful self-directed learners. Similarly, the trainees' ability to set clear learning goals and follow through with learning plans echoes findings from Nganga et al. [21], who found that goal-setting is a fundamental aspect of SDL that enhances learner engagement and persistence.

Moreover, the ability of trainees to engage in reflective practices, such as learning from both successes and failures, mirrors the findings of Huxtable-Thomas and Brahm [22], who stressed the importance of self-reflection in the SDL process. Reflective learning enables individuals to adjust their strategies and become more self-aware, which in turn enhances their learning outcomes. In this study, most participants demonstrated a strong inclination towards self-reflection, suggesting that they are equipped to engage in critical thinking and adapt their learning strategies when necessary.

However, there are notable differences when comparing these findings to the broader literature. While many studies on SDL focus on its general application in higher education, fewer studies specifically explore the role of self-assessment in shaping SDL, particularly within the context of social studies education. This study contributes to filling this gap by highlighting the role of self-assessment as a tool for fostering SDL among teacher trainees. Self-assessment enables trainees to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to take greater responsibility for their learning. This aligns with Flavian [23], who emphasized the importance of self-awareness in the development of independent learners. However, unlike some previous research, which has primarily focused on self-assessment in traditional classroom settings, this study demonstrates how self-assessment can be integrated into a social studies curriculum to enhance the autonomy and engagement of future educators.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on the perceptions of teacher trainees within a teacher training center in Cambodia, providing a unique cultural and educational context. Most existing studies on SDL have been conducted in Western settings, where educational practices and learner characteristics may differ significantly. By examining SDL in a non-Western context, this study contributes new insights into how self-directed learning is perceived and practiced in countries with different educational and cultural frameworks. Additionally, this research highlights the significant role of interpersonal communication, such as peer interaction and cultural exchange, which is often underexplored in SDL literature. The high level of interest in learning from the language and culture of others, as shown in the responses, suggests that trainees value collaborative learning environments and are open to integrating cultural diversity into their learning processes.

The implications of this study are significant for the design of teacher training programs. The findings suggest that integrating SDL strategies, particularly self-assessment and collaborative learning, can enhance the motivation, autonomy, and preparedness of teacher trainees. Educators and program designers should consider incorporating self-assessment tools into their curricula, especially in social studies education, to help trainees develop critical thinking, self-regulation, and reflective practices. Additionally, fostering a culture of peer collaboration and cultural exchange could further enhance the SDL experience and contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment. These strategies can also support the development of lifelong learning habits that are essential for teachers in adapting to the evolving demands of the profession.

However, there are some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The research was conducted at a single teacher training center in Cambodia, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts, particularly those in different countries or educational systems. Furthermore, the study relied solely on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or lack of self-awareness. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample to include trainees from multiple institutions or using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate the findings. Additionally, examining the long-term impact of SDL strategies, such as self-assessment, on teaching practice and professional development would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these approaches beyond the training period. This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of teacher trainees regarding Self-Directed Learning in

social studies, highlighting the importance of motivation, goal-setting, self-reflection, and interpersonal communication. By focusing on self-assessment and cultural exchange, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on SDL in teacher education, offering a unique perspective from a non-Western context. The findings suggest practical implications for teacher training programs, but also point to areas for further research to enhance the understanding of SDL in diverse educational settings.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the positive perceptions of teacher trainees regarding SDL in social studies, demonstrating that the majority of trainees exhibit strong motivation, goal-setting abilities, self-reflection, and communication skills essential for autonomous learning. The integration of self-assessment, cultural exchange, and peer interaction proves to be valuable in fostering SDL, and the findings underscore the need for teacher training programs to emphasize these aspects in developing self-regulated, reflective, and culturally aware future educators. While the study offers significant insights into SDL in a non-Western context, it also points to areas for further research, particularly in exploring the long-term impact of SDL strategies on teaching practice and extending the study to a broader range of educational settings.

## Author Contribution

B.P. conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, developed the research instruments, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the original manuscript. N.R. contributed to data interpretation, validation of findings, and critical revision of the manuscript for intellectual content. C.S.O. supported the literature review process, assisted in refining the methodology, and contributed to the discussion and conclusion sections. All authors reviewed, edited, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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