



Situation of Professional Development via Self-Directed Learning of Social Work Students in Hanoi National University of Education

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the current situation of professional development (PD) capacity through self-directed learning (including knowledge, awareness, intervention skills, professional attitudes) of social work students in Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE). To achieve this goal, we conducted a random survey of 135 students by observation methods, and questionnaires. Self-directed learning (SDL) is one effective tool to enhance professional learning (which is a key component of professional development, in addition to professional identity and professional practice) because it oriented a process for students to achieve the desired results. Research results show that students' awareness, attitudes, and skills of professional development via self-directed learning are weak. Students are not aware of and understand how to develop their profession. The activities they did are just according to their intuition and do not have the necessary skills for PD. This leads to the recommendation for an educational group social work. This suggested group work aims to enhance awareness, attitudes, and skills of professional development through SDL of Social Work students in HNUE by providing knowledge, skills, and the way how to apply them to actual activities, promoting the capacity of the individual.

KEYWORDS: Group Social Work, Professional Development, Self-Directed Learning, Social Work Student.

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional development (PD) in general and self-directed learning (SDL) in particular are very important for social work students in Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE).

The self-learning of social work students in HNUE is not good. They are still not active in self-research and learning. According to my observations, the Good academic results are usually high and there are still many students with Average and Weak results. Besides, many students are not interested in learning. The learning attitude is not positive, there is no enthusiasm for the profession. On the other hand, some students still do not have appropriate learning methods to satisfy their professional development. In addition, only a few students after graduation continue to study or work in the social work field.

Except for the individual learning ability, the reason social work students in HNUE are not interested in learning is that they have not found suitable learning methods, and awareness of the importance of professional development is not good. Moreover, they have not grasped the basic theories during their practice and have not yet applied those theories to practice. This makes the practice ineffective, and unable to develop professionally.

Because of the above reasons, it can be seen that enhancing students' SDL is essential. SDL is the best tool for them to orient their future profession and develop it. However, both PD and SDL are new concepts in Vietnam, for social work students in HNUE to enhance SDL to contribute to professional development, first of all, it is needed to know how students' awareness, attitudes, and skills are in this regard. Only then can we come up with solutions for students.

2. RESEARCH RESULT

2.1. Professional development awareness via self-directed learning of social work students in HNUE

To evaluate the PD awareness SDL of social work students, HNUE needs many different factors. In this study, I evaluate three main factors: (1) Students' correct identification of PD activities through SDL, (2) Students determine knowledge and skills gained through PD activities through SDL, and (3) Students' understanding of SDL as a tool to support PD.



From the above evaluation factors, research has shown that SW students are not aware of PD via SDL. To prove this, here are the specific figures:

*** Identify PD activities through SDL**

Table Error! No text of specified style in document. Percentage of students choosing the right activities of PD through SDL

<i>PD activities through SDL</i>	Proportion
Study in class	70.4%
Join seminars, career session	67.4%
Read documents related to social work	80.0%
Do volunteer and charity programs	70.4%
Teaching life skills	66.7%
Going to practice/internship	77.8%

Table 1. Percentage of students choosing the wrong activities of PD through SDL

<i>Not be PD activities through SDL</i>	Proportion
Participate in arts and sports	19.3%
Census	26.7%
Going to visit the scenic spots.	11.1%
Blood donation	11.9%
Join activities Youth Union	45.9%
Working part-time (sales, service)	8.1%
Going to tutor	9.6%

The good sign from the two tables above shows that the number of students choosing the right activities of PD via SDL is higher than the number of students choosing wrong. The proportion of students choosing to study in class, join seminars, career sessions, read documents related to SW, do volunteer and charity programs, teach life skills, and go to practice/internship was 70.4%, 67.4%, 80.0%, 70.4%, 66.7%, and 77.8% respectively, in which, reading documents related to SW has the highest number of students who believe that it is the activity supporting PD via SDL the most. However, the number of students choosing the wrong activities to support PD via SDL is not small, and students who choose right still choose the wrong answers. The number of students choosing the right and enough activities to support PD via SDL is not much. Besides, the activities supporting PD via SDL, students are easily confused with some activities such as Census and Join activities Youth Union. These two activities are indeed somewhat related to social work, but when participating in these two activities, it is mainly to accumulate general social knowledge, general soft skills, and participate in practical activities. related to SW, not to practice professional skills.

*** Identify knowledge and skills gained via PD activities through SDL**

When asked about what students learned through the supportive activities for PD via SDL, most of the students said what they learned. However, not all students can answer what they learn through these activities. Although the question needs to be answered "specifically what knowledge, what skills?", however, quite a lot of students just answer in general such as: "Know more about knowledge and skills", "Get more specialized knowledge and necessary skills ", etc. There are 24.4% corresponding to 33 students with such answers, even with very long answers, but not indicating a specific knowledge or skill. In contrast, there are many students (75.6%) who have shown specific knowledge and skills such as knowledge of the group and individual social work, community development; knowledge of the LGBT community, children; and hospital social work, school social work; understanding of human psychology, knowing communication skills, planning, working with clients, etc.

** Understanding SDL as a tool to support PD*

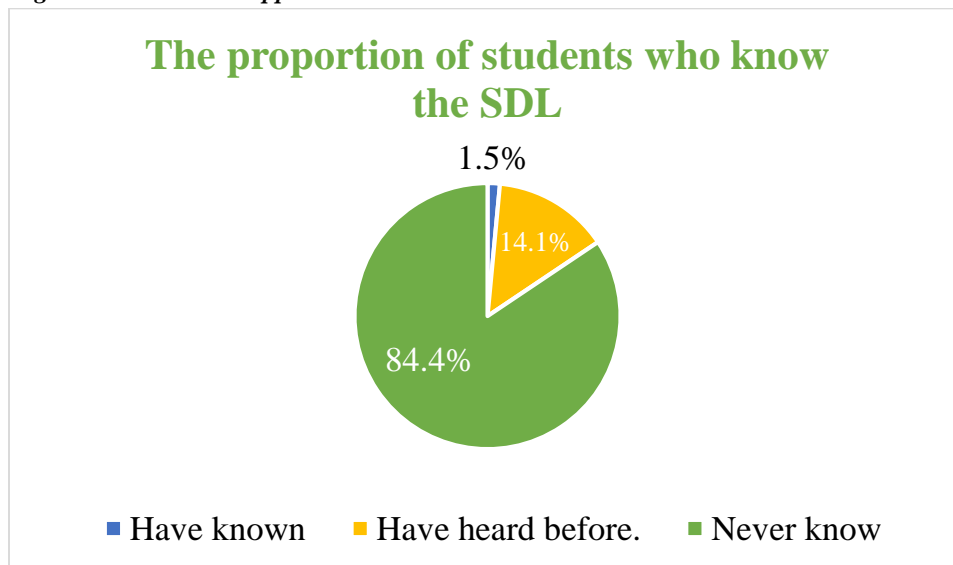


Figure 1. Students' understanding of SDL as a tool to support PD

The above chart shows that most social work students, HNUE do not know about SDL as a tool to support PD, 84.4% is the rate of these students. The number of students who have heard about SDL accounts for 14.1%. Most of them have heard of but are completely uncertain about the contents of the SDL, having only heard of the term's name. Very few students said that they knew about SDL, only 1.5% of the students participating in the survey. However, when I interviewed them, I noticed that they seem to have misunderstood SDL, and what they know has no scientific basis.

From the above aspects, it can be confirmed that social work students in HNUE have incorrect awareness about PD via SDL. What they know is mainly based on their inference without a scientific basis. Besides, they have had wrong thoughts about SDL and confuse it with practicing career skills. And not all students can recognize the knowledge and skills they acquire. Because of this situation, social work students in HNUE need to enhance their awareness of PD through SDL.

2.2. Professional development attitude via self-directed learning of social work students in HNUE

The PD attitude via SDL of social work students, HNUE is assessed by the student's willingness to learn. In this study, I use students' participation in scientific research and document research and ask students more about their willingness to participate in SDL activities to evaluate and identify students' PD attitudes via SDL.

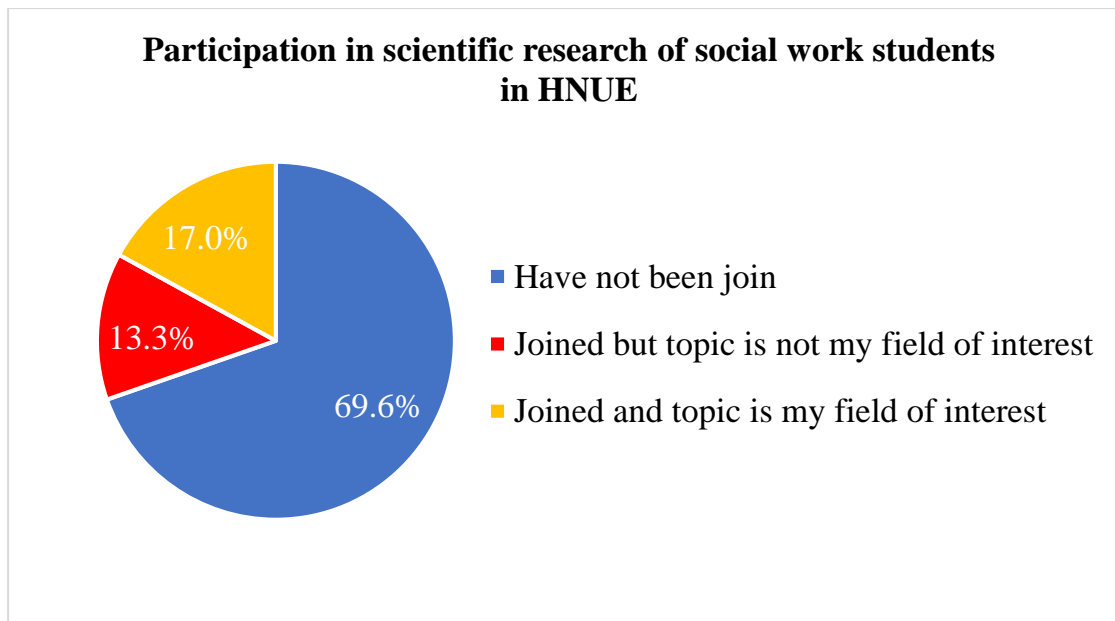


Figure 2. The proportion of social work students in HNUE participating in scientific research in the fields they are interested in

Scientific research is an effective learning method, especially for SDL in PD. However, the number of SW students in HNUE participating in scientific research is relatively small, less than 1/3 of the total number of students participating in the survey. From my observations, I find that students often hesitate to participate in scientific research because according to them, it wastes time, is difficult to do, troublesome, too disciplined, etc. Most of them do not think about what they will get back to scientific research. This shows that these students do not have a visionary attitude and are ready to study. On the contrary, students who have participated in the research believe that it is true that it is very time-consuming, but when done, they will know how to properly manage their time, so that time is not wasted. In addition, they also claimed that it was difficult and troublesome, but when completed, they will find themselves doing a lot of things, overcoming their barriers. It is the principles that this activity requires that make themselves more and more careful, not to mention that during the research process they also learn a lot of new knowledge. Among the students who have ever participated in scientific research, there are 13.3% of students researching a topic in a field they are not interested in, and 17% of students doing a topic related to their field of interest. For those who do not research the field, they are interested in, most of them are because they are not interested in a certain field or they follow the development trend of SW. But when doing research, they will learn a lot of new knowledge, maybe they will be interested in this field later? As for the students who research in the right field that they are interested in, they have the orientation from the beginning of their learning. The selection of topics according to the fields they focus on is for them to reinforce the knowledge that they want to grasp and understand deeply. These can be considered as students who have SDL attitudes, although this proportion of students is small (17%).

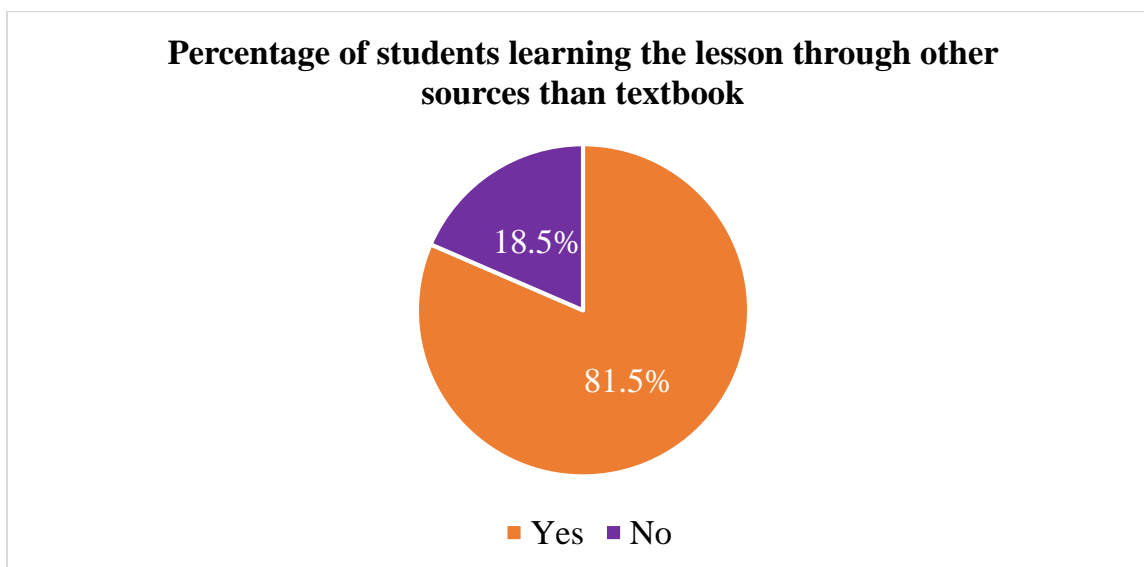


Figure 3. Percentage of social work students in HNUE learning the lesson through other sources than textbook

Through the above chart, it can be seen that social work students and HNUE are very active in research documents. To learn about issues and knowledge related to social work lessons, they will look for many different resources, not just study through the textbooks introduced by the lecturers. Up to 81.5% of 110 students have found other resources to study. They mainly learn through the online materials on the internet and the materials submitted by the instructor. In addition, they also learn through essays, articles published or in the resources of the Faculty of social work; through books, they bought themselves or found in the library, etc. There are many other sources as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Percentage of social work students in HNUE choosing other resources than the textbook

Resources	Proportion
Books I buy	37.3%
Library books / documents	30%
Document files sent by teachers	69.1%
Online documents on the Internet	88.2%
Essays, articles published or in the resources of the Faculty	41.8%
Ask for documents from relevant organizations	26.4%
Ask for available documents of relatives, friends, and teachers	39.1%
Pages, groups, and forums related to social work	0.9%

Besides these specific issues, I also surveyed students' desire to learn about SDL tools in PD. The results made me feel excited. Up to 88.1% of students are willing to learn about this tool.

2.3. Professional development skills via self-directed learning of social work students in HNUE

The PD skills via SDL of social work students in HNUE are assessed by the activities that students have performed along with their recognition of the SDL.

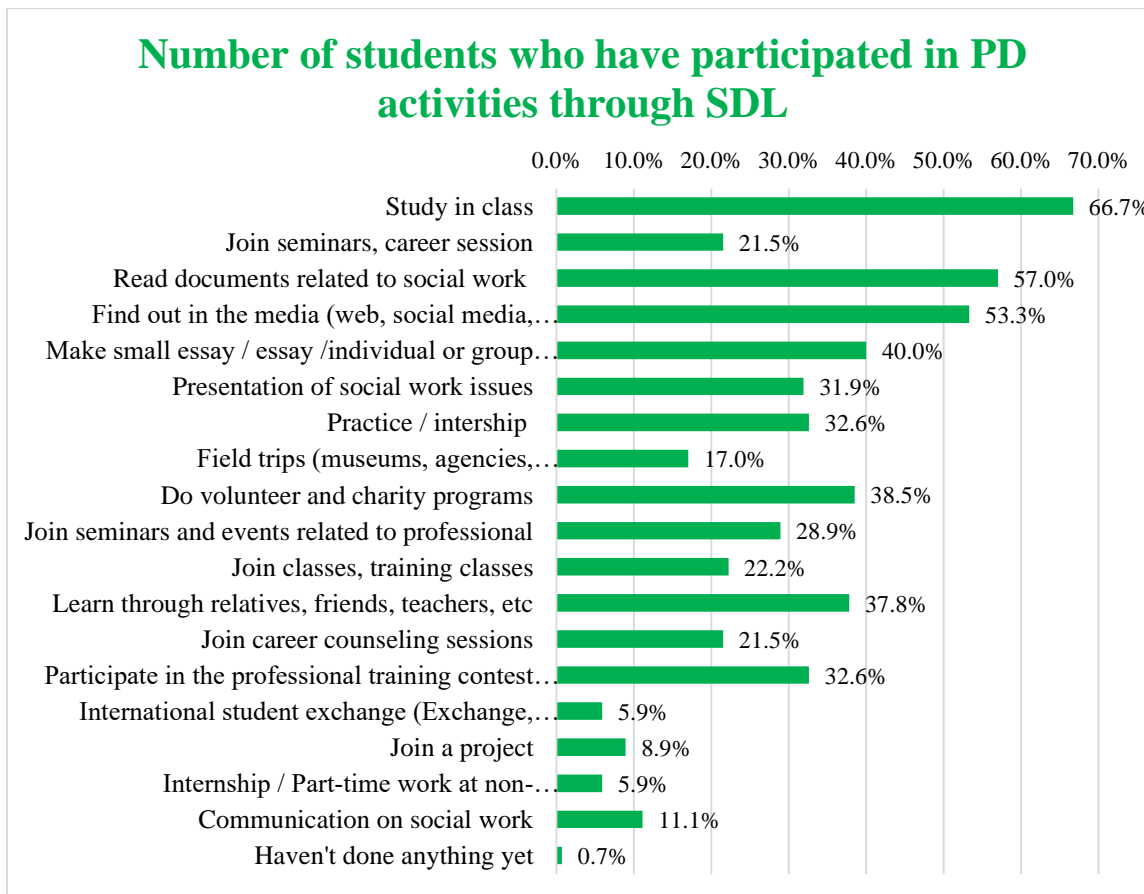


Figure 4. Number of students who have participated in PD activities through SDL

SW students in HNUE participated in most activities aimed at PD through SDL. Especially activities: learning in class and reading documents related to SW are the most important activities in PD's SDL process, the rate of students participating or this activity is 66.7% and 57% respectively. These are the basic activities of SDL. In addition, students actively participate in other activities such as: Finding out in the media (web, social media, forums, etc); Making small essays/essay/individual or group exercises; Doing volunteer and charity programs; Learning through relatives, friends, teachers, etc; Practice/internship; Participate in the professional training contest of Faculty (Participate in support or the main group); Presentation of social work issues. Activities with less student participation include: Field trips (museums, agencies, organizations, etc); Communication on social work, and Joining a project accounted for 17%, 11.1%, and 8.9% respectively. The activities with the least amount of student participation are the two activities related to English proficiency: International student exchange (Exchange, supporting international students in studying, etc) and Internship / Part-time work at non-governmental organizations. with a rate of 5.9%.

The participation in these activities by students shows that one is the student consciously cultivating the necessary skills for PD, the other is that the students tend to study, and research in many other ways. However, when asking more carefully about the issue of SDL, students do not know it and do not know how to participate but such activity means they are self-directed for PD. Absolutely, the things they do are only instinctive, they feel they want to learn something, and they will participate in those activities only.



Besides participating in activities, time management and study planning are also skills for PD via SDL. However, since students do not know completely, SDL can only assess whether they have practiced that skill or not. Learning time and whether they have a study plan or not can cover all the issues of SDL. However, this will also be the basis for evaluating their initial skills and the reality of their SDL skills.

Looking at the pie chart below, it can be seen that the time students spend studying is too little. Up to 53.3% of students study less than 10 sessions (2 - 3 hours per session) / week and only 10.4% of students study more than 15 sessions (2 - 3 hours per session) / week. The rest are students who study and research from 10 to 15 sessions (2 - 3 hours per session) / week. And this includes the time spent studying in class, so the time students do self-study will be less. This is probably because students do not have management skills in SDL, so the time they give priority to learning is not much, leading to ineffectiveness in SDL in particular and PD in general.

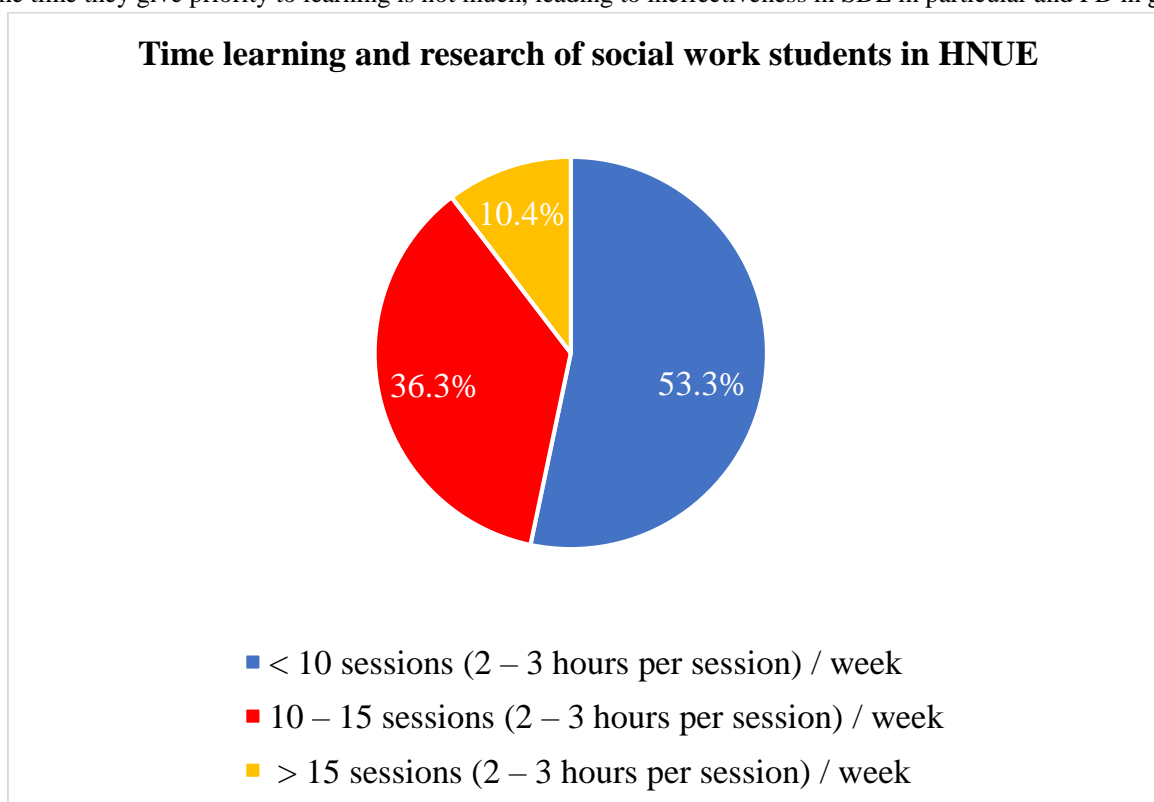


Figure 5. Time learning and research of SW students in HNUE

It is easy to see that the rate of social work students in HNUE with and without plans for learning goals is almost similar to each other, 17% difference. In practice, however, for students who say they often plan their studies, not everyone does it correctly. Some students only set goals, some students just list the action plans to do and arrange them according to the corresponding execution time. Most people do not have the skills to prepare resources so before doing the work there may be enough tools to do it. Or everyone does not have the skills to self-monitoring their work to perform the activity in the right direction and pursue the plan to the end, or when facing obstacles, it is necessary to have a flexible change without affecting the progress of the plan.

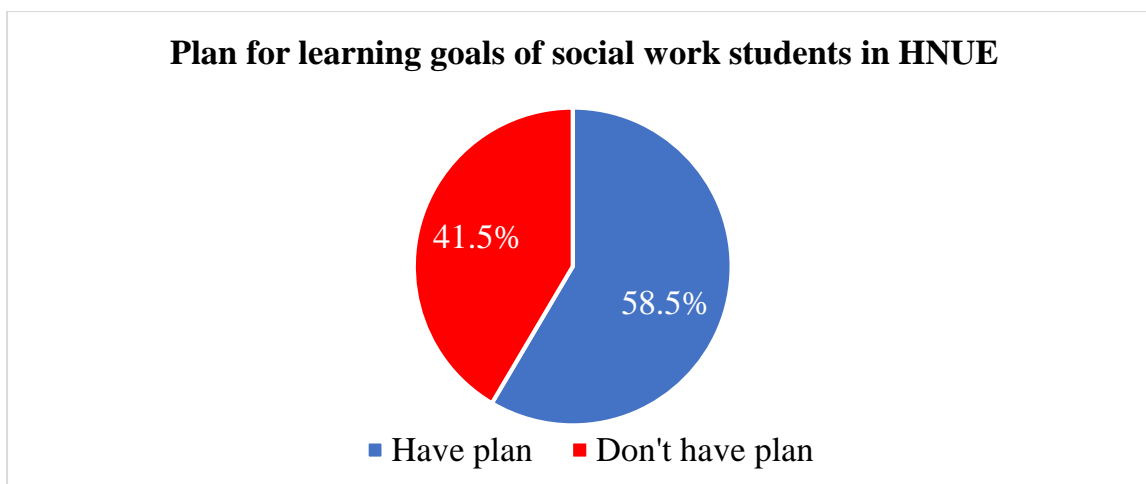


Figure 6. Percentage of social work students in HNUE with and without plans for learning goals

In summary, these initial assessment factors of SDL skills of social work students, HNUE in PD can partly comment that students do not have this skill. Student actions are still instinctive. Maybe the above factors can not accurately assess SDL skills, but also helped me see the general situation on this issue.

3. CONCLUSION

SDL is a learning tool to help students develop their professionals. SDL is different from self-study in that SDL students not only study independently but also need the help of others. SDL implementation should be based on its model and progress. This is the framework for which students implement action plans for PD via SDL. PD through SDL is both self-motivating, self-management, monitoring of one's learning activities, and making appropriate modifications. At the same time, combining with external support to adjust the method as well as the approach to each activity.

Because this is one of the very new concepts for the Faculty of Social Work in particular and HNUE in general, the actual situation of students' SDL has many shortcomings. Through the survey and the result synthesis process, it can be seen that social work students in HNUE do not have enough knowledge and skills in SDL for PD. Students' awareness is weak, attitudes are not clear and they do not have the necessary skills. Considering the content aspect of the three aspects of SDL (perception, attitude, skills), almost all students are acting instinctively and not on any scientific basis. This can lead to ineffective learning.

The research results help identify students' problems and this is considered the key to further solutions. With the initial assessments that social work students in HNUE need to improve their awareness, attitude, and skills of SDL to develop their profession. To do that, I realize that it is necessary to have appropriate solutions to support students to develop professionally through SDL, it is necessary to have an activity with a specific method such as group social work. In addition, each student himself/herself needs to have a sense of actively researching SDL and practicing skills to improve learning and contribute to professional development through SDL. If appropriate solutions can be implemented, surely the situation of SDL in this study will have a positive change.

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