

SELF - ASSESSMENT OF STUDY SKILLS OF DENTAL STUDENTS: A TOOL TO UPGRADE HEALTHCARE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Healthcare education is delivered to students in a variety of ways and the performance of students can be assessed by several methods, one of which is study skills. The importance of using good study techniques by students to acquire knowledge and communicate it during exams was emphasized in healthcare education. Students must alter their study techniques if they want to achieve better academically, particularly in the dental field. The aim of this study was to evaluate dental students' self-assessment of study skills and to recommend appropriate study strategies for academic performance improvement.

A modified self-assessment of study skills questionnaire (from the University of Central Florida's Student Academic Resource Center) was administered to all dentistry undergraduate

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students in their first through last year. This questionnaire addresses eight areas, including study habits, textbook usage, note-taking, memorization, time management, test-taking strategies and anxiety, motivated attitude, and stress management for health and wellness. The findings revealed that more than 80% of students lacked knowledge of study techniques since they only used one or two domain characteristics and lacked any technical expertise. In order to raise their academic performance, students are eager to learn about all the domains.

Researchers concluded that, the Teaching-Learning process is significantly impacted by study skills. Students are encouraged to attain academic goals by altering their study habits by using Study Skills to change their psychology about study pattern. The secret to success in the life of a student who becomes an active learner is to develop their study skills.

Keywords: Study skills, Students, Active Learner, Academic Performance, Strategy, Teaching-Learning

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare education necessitates the use of effective study skills by students in order to gain knowledge and express it during theory and practical examinations and viva-voce. Because most of the healthcare students are not aware of proper study strategies, they are failing to gain the necessary knowledge during their learning period as per the scheduled University timeframe. Finally, as a result of incorrect study habits, students do not achieve the expected results in the University examinations. Research shows that, it is critical to comprehend what are the causes for their poor academic performance (Kornell & Bjork, 2007).

It has been studied that factors which contribute to poor academic performance (Hartwig & Dunlosky, 2012) are-Skills gaps; low self-esteem; time management issues; not knowing how to study; disorganised study pattern; low motivation; reluctance to learn; and a lack of support. Students need to develop effective study skills in order to learn study material thoroughly. Students with strong study skills can quickly identify effective study strategies that will improve their academic performance. The aim of this study was to evaluate dental (B.D.S.-

Bachelor of Dental Surgery) students' self-assessment of study skills and to recommend appropriate study strategies for improvement in academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment of student's performance

The process of evaluating a student's ability is known as 'assessment' (Azad et al., 2012). An assessment is the measure to check a student's competence. It helps to measure students' performances as well as indicates efficacy of teaching strategies and its relevance in academics. This helps to identify student's strengths and weaknesses in studies which helps to provide specialized academic support to students (Yambi Tomas, Yambi Caluyua, 2020). Educators or facilitators routinely measured student's performance by **Formative and Summative assessment**. Traditional assessment decides the performance of students by providing 'Grades or Percentage' and 'Pass and Fail' as per the marks obtained by students in examination. On the basis of result, teachers give feedback to students and motivate them to perform better in future (Race P, Page K, 2001).

Students Self-assessment

'Self-assessment' is a process by which students screen and assess the quality of their intellectual ability and performance in academics and identify strategies to improve it further with effective study skills. Self-assessment is a cyclical ongoing process wherein student continuously monitor, evaluate, identify and implement corrective measures for improvement in study strategies. It happens when students evaluate their own effort to progress performance by recognising incongruities among existing and anticipated performance. This is the base of today's *Standards-Based Education*, facilitate student self-assessment (McMillan J. H. and Hearn J. 2008.).

The self-assessment regarding own performance in writing in examinations, presentations, viva-voce, pre-clinical and clinical work, journal completion work, time bound tasks and future planning as per the current situation is decided by students on their own. However, it would be appreciated when judged individually through reflections on own performance and maintaining log books, diaries and future strategies (Race P, Page K, 2001). A diagnostic test for assessing students' study skills is self-assessment of study skills. Identifying study skills is helpful in understanding oneself as an active and independent learner. This aids to boost confidence and makes students ready for self-directed learning. Thus, ultimately student become psychologically strong and able to face any adverse situation in future.

Study skills

Study skills can be traced since the 1940s, when various manuals have been published to help students learn study skills and improve their performance in their respective fields (Preston & Rah, 2006; Kranyik et al., 1963; Cohn & Marvin, 1979).

Study skills, according to Ball (2011), *"comprise an integrated repertoire of tactics and strategies that facilitates the acquisition, organisation, retention, and application of new information."*

'Planning' is the key to study skills by *'prioritizing realistic and well-organised study schedule'*, (Thomas Harboe & Rikke von Müllen, 2007). Planning would be 'MARC' i.e. *Manageable, Attainable, Realistic and Clear*. Study skills include developing a study routine, reading textbooks correctly, taking notes, memorising, time management, test strategy/test anxiety, a positive attitude, and maintaining health and wellness through stress management.

Study skills can have a significant impact on the Teaching-Learning process. To improve academic performance, students have to change their study habits. Several studies were conducted to learn about the various study techniques used by students to achieve academic success and holistic development (West & Sadoski, 2011). Dental students need to be effective lifelong learners in order to continue enhancing life personally and professionally. An effective

study skill promotes self-motivation by improving retention power, concentration, organisation, time management, and achieving higher grades (Bjork, Dunlosky & Kornell, 2013). It is essential for healthcare students to develop clinical skills along with theoretical knowledge to treat patients successfully.

The secret to success in life for a healthcare student who transforms into an active learner is to consistently use excellent study techniques. With this context, the current study's aim and objectives were as follows:-

Aim and Objectives:

- 1) To evaluate dental students' self-assessment of study skills.
- 2) To recommend appropriate study strategies for academic performance improvement.
- 3) To raise awareness of the value of learning study skills.
- 4) To encourage students to develop study skills in order to improve their academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study skills of first-year to final-year dental students at VSPM's Dental College & Research Centre in Nagpur were evaluated. After receiving approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee, a self-assessment of study skills questionnaire (from the University of Central Florida's Student Academic Resource Center) was modified and used as a survey tool in this study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first part includes 'Demographic information' which includes information about gender and educational level and second part includes 40 specific questions in eight domains (5 questions per domain) namely, "*Studying, Reading Textbooks, Taking Notes, Memorizing, Time Management, Test Strategies/Anxiety, Motivation/Attitude, and Health/Wellness/ Stress Management.*"

The scoring criteria were on a three-point Likert scale: frequently (10), occasionally (5), and rarely (0). If the student selected 'Often,' he or she can earn 10 points, 'Sometimes,' 5 points, and 'Rarely,' 0 points.

Each domain has five questions and is scored 0-50, whereas the total score for all eight domains is 0-400. Individual domain scores of less than 30 indicate that study skills require improvement. Individual domain scores 31-50 should continue to study in the same way; no improvement is required; however, the same study pattern should be followed with minor changes if necessary.

The same criteria were applied to the sum scores for all categories, which included scores between 0 and 300 that needed improvement and scores between 301 and 400 that could keep the same level of study skills.

Students consent was obtained before distributing questionnaires. After receiving responses, an interactive session was conducted to comprehensively explore eight domains and offer the best study skills techniques to raise students' academic performance. Through a power point presentation, the technical specifics were covered, and the students' comments were considered in accordance with the needs of their academic year of study. First-year and final-year dentistry students were given special attention in order to emphasize the need of developing study skills and to motivate them to do so in order to enhance their future academic success. First-year students should be expected to start using suitable study tactics from the very first day of their healthcare education in order to prepare their future study methods over the duration of their five academic years. The final-year students who registered for eight disciplines are quite anxious about finishing the clinical quota as well as the extensive coursework within the allotted time. They can succeed and finish their studies quickly if they organise their work effectively with daily "To-Do" lists. Students received counselling, and several methods for calming their minds and enhancing memory activities were taught.

All participants' feedback was collected, and regular follow-up was conducted.

In this descriptive cross-sectional quantitative and qualitative study, 400 subjects took part, with incomplete questionnaires being excluded from final statistical analysis using the appropriate SPSS Version.

RESULTS

(Table 1) shows the total number of respondents who took part in this study, as well as their gender and educational level/academic year of study distribution. This study included 371 first to fourth year undergraduate dental students, 42 of whom were male and 329 of whom were female.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by year of study and gender

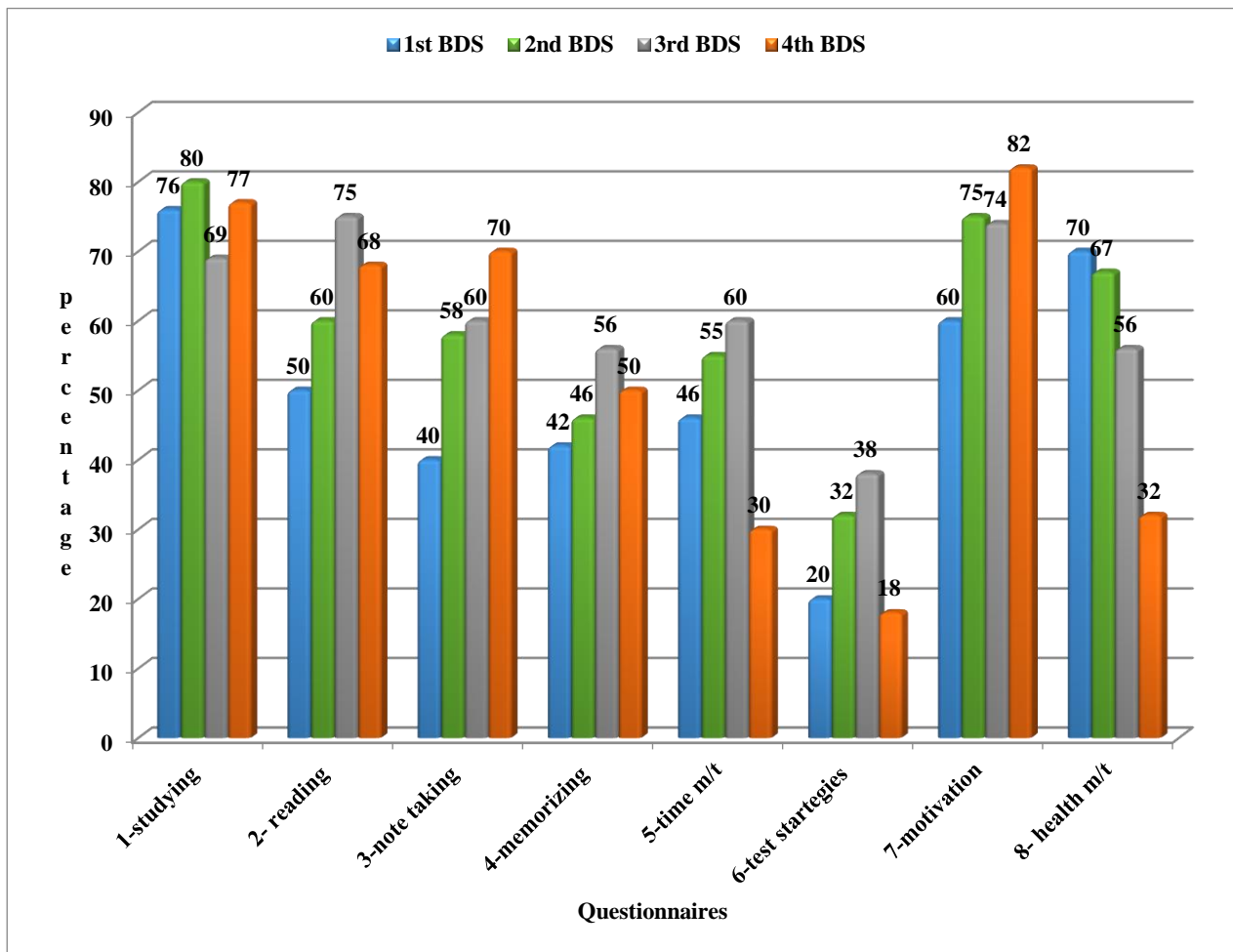
Year of study	Total students	Male	Female
First BDS	98	12	86
Second BDS	93	09	84
Third BDS	89	10	79
Final BDS	91	11	80
Total	371	42	329

Responses for each domain are shown in (Table 2 and Graph 1). Students' study skills vary depending on their academic year.

Table 2: Mean value of all 8 domains of study skills

Year of Study	1 Studying	2 Reading	3 Note Taking	4 Memorizing	5 Time Management	6 Test Strategies	7 Motivation/ Attitude	8 Health/ stress management
1 st BDS	76%	50%	40%	42%	46%	20%	60%	70%
2 nd BDS	80%	60%	58%	46%	55%	32%	75%	67%
3 rd BDS	69%	75%	60%	56%	60%	38%	74%	56%
4 th BDS	77%	68%	70%	50%	30%	18%	82%	32%

Graph 1: Mean value of all 8 domain



The detailed outcome of each domain with more than 30 points is as follows:

Domain 1-Studying; shows more than 30 scores including 76% (1st BDS); 80% (2nd BDS); 69% (3rd BDS) and 77% (4th BDS).

Domain 2: Reading; shows more than 30 scores including 50% (1stBDS); 60% (2ndBDS); 75% (3rd BDS) and 68% (4th BDS).

Domain 3: Note Taking; shows more than 30 scores including 40% (1st BDS); 58% (2nd BDS); 60% (3rd BDS) and 70% (4th BDS). First year students show less response to note taking and they need to concentrate to improve this score.

Domain 4: Memorizing; shows more than 30 scores including 42% (1st BDS); 46% (2nd BDS); 56% (3rd BDS) and 50% (4th BDS). Memorizing during the examination was faced by all students.

Domain 5: Time Management; has more than 30 scores, including 46% (1st BDS), 55% (2nd BDS), 60% (3rd BDS), and 30% (3rd BDS) (4th BDS). First-year BDS students are not aware of proper time management, and final-year students must plan an 8-subject study schedule for the entire year.

Domain 6: Test Strategies/Anxiety; has more than 30 scores, including 20% (1stBDS), 32% (2ndBDS), 38% (3rd BDS), and 18% (4thBDS) (4th BDS). Students must improve their test-taking strategies throughout the year.

Domain 7: Motivation/Attitude; has more than 30 scores, including 60% (1st BDS), 75% (2nd BDS), 74% (3rd BDS), and 82 % (4th BDS). It demonstrates that first-year BDS students are less motivated to pursue dental studies because the majority of them were interested in medical fields which they were unable to pursue.

Domain 8: Health/Wellness/Stress management; has more than 30 scores, including 70% (1stBDS), 67 percent (2nd BDS), 56% (3rd BDS), and 32%. (4th BDS).

Students in their final year of BDS must take care of their health and cope with the stress of taking eight subjects in a short amount of time.

Following a detailed discussion of each subject, students offered feedback. More than 80% of students were found to be not aware of study abilities in feedback since they only employed

one or two domain criteria without detailed knowledge. It was very beneficial for them to advance academically. To raise their academic performance, students were eager to learn about all the domains. Students in their last year were eager to pick up time management and memorization techniques.

DISCUSSION

Across the four years of the study, there were 329 female participants and 42 male participants. Study skills vary from person to person and are independent of one's gender or educational background. Now, the author goes through each area in detail to help students learn the best study habits whenever they're ready. The following sentences, which are all contained within the following eight domains, all suggest the optimal study techniques that students should employ. The statements for each domain are listed here for your convenience. After a few months, when they believe their study techniques have improved, students are encouraged to complete this self-assessment of study skills questionnaire. The student can then compete with themselves to enhance their academic performance by comparing their pre- and post-scores.

Domain 1-Studying- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I study where it is quiet and has few distractions.
- I study for a length of time then take a short break before returning to studying
- I have all my supplies handy when I study, such as pens, paper, calculator, etc.
- I set study goals, such as the number of Questions I will do or pages I will read.
- I study each subject at least one hour daily

Students learned how to study every subject thoroughly and consistently as part of their academic training. This can be accomplished by setting up a study table in a peaceful area with all necessary materials nearby, such as pens, paper, and books, in order to reduce the likelihood of interruptions. It was explained to them how to develop reading objectives and allocate at least an hour each day with brief breaks to each subject.

Domain 2: Reading- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I browse the headings, pictures, charts, questions and summaries before I start reading a chapter.
- I make questions from a chapter before, during, and after reading it.
- I try to get the meaning of new words as I see them for the first time.
- I look for familiar concepts as well as ideas that spark my interest as I read.
- I look for the main ideas as I read.

Reading textbooks covered many methods for conceptual understanding.

A "REAP" method, which stands for "Read, Encode, Annotate, and Ponder," helps students comprehend ideas when they are introduced to a subject or topic for the first time.

The "SQ3R" Technique includes reading, reciting, surveying, and reviewing the subject material (Huntington Learning Center).

- *Survey: titles, headings, pictures, graphs, charts, etc.*
- *Questioning: turn boldfaced subtitles into questions*
- *Reading: read with the purpose of answering questions*
- *Reciting: stop periodically to check for understanding*
- *Reviewing: go back to answer your questions, answer chapter questions, review material a little every night*

Simple techniques were used to define reading strategies. Before beginning the reading, students were asked to take a quick look at a chapter to have a sense of its contents and length so that they could allow enough time to finish it. According to the last 10 years' worth of university examination question papers, it was initially anticipated that various types of questions on that subject would be listed at the top of the page. They were instructed to highlight crucial information and annotate any locations where they saw MCQ's while reading. Regularly reviewing all topics will help you grasp them thoroughly and retain information when you write or respond to questions in theoretical or practical exams.

Domain 3: Note Taking- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I take notes as I read my text books.
- I take notes during class lectures.
- I rework, rewrite, or type up my notes.
- I compare my notes with a classmate.
- I try to organize main ideas and details into a meaningful method.

Taking Notes described and demonstrated methods for taking notes while listening to lectures and reading a textbook. For instance, all students were required to use the "Cornell Note Taking Method" during ordinary lectures in order to gain a greater grasp of this technique. There were other introductions of "Concept Mapping" and "Mind Mapping Techniques." While preparing personal notes and comparing them with students who received high marks, rewriting is a need. In order to prepare for exams, students should attempt to organise their answers according to the key idea and importance.

Domain 4: Memorizing- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I try to study during my personal peak energy time to increase my concentration level.
- I test myself over material that could appear on future exams.
- I say difficult concepts out loud in order to understand them better.
- I summarize my notes into my own words, for better understanding.
- I try to create associations between new material I am trying to learn an information I already know.

Various methods for enhancing focus and retaining information for longer periods of time are included in the process of memorizing. Information can be organized and memorized with the help of acronyms and mnemonics. It is easier to recall memories when they are needed if one studies while they are at their most alert. Students are greatly encouraged to memories study information for a long time by self-testing, speaking out loud about challenging concepts, and summarizing notes in their own terms. Other methods include visualization, a multiple interpretation strategy, random repetitions with flash cards, and others.

Domain 5: Time Management- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I use a planner (or other method) to write down upcoming academic and personal activities.
- I use a “to do” list to keep track of completing my academic and personal activities.
- I start studying for tests at least several days before I take them.
- I start assignments, homework and projects as soon as they are assigned.
- I have enough time for college and fun

Time management tools include a "Planner" to list impending academic and extracurricular commitments and a "To Do List" to track when students finish those commitments. How can "procrastination" be defeated when it serves as a barrier to goal achievement? A set of games created to make studying Smarter rather than Harder were used to demonstrate to pupils the concept of "prioritizing practice," which helps in finishing activities within or before the allotted time. The eight subjects for the final-year students could not be scheduled. In this instance, a sample study schedule for all eight disciplines was created, discussed, and given to students in their final year. They can refer this sample time table and plan their own study schedule. This illustrates that in order for pupils to succeed academically, they need the right kind of mentoring. Saving time for enjoyment by consistently using time management strategies.

Domain 6: Test Strategies/Anxiety – The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I anticipate what possible questions may be asked on my tests and make sure I know the answers
- I feel confident that I am prepared for the exam.
- I take time to understand the exam questions before starting to answer
- I usually get a good night's rest prior to a scheduled exam
- I am calmly able to recall what I know during an exam

By refining their writing abilities, students in Test Strategies/Test Anxiety classes felt more at ease during all examinations. When they thoroughly prepared for the exam, students feel confident. Before exams, students should get a good night's sleep to calm their minds and help them remember the content they have read.

Domain 7: Motivation/Attitude – The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I sit near the front of the class if possible.
- I am alert in classes.
- I ask the instructor questions when clarification is needed
- I attend class regularly.
- I take the initiative in group activities and discussions.

Group exercises and conversations in Motivation/Attitude help students become more self-assured, which encourages them to regularly attend class. Academic goals are more successfully attained when studied in groups. To keep themselves alert during class, students should sit in the front row of the room. The student should consistently attend class and ask the teacher any questions if they have any query. When in a group, he or she ought to take an active part.

Domain 8: Health/Wellness/Stress management- The statements mentioned under this domain are as follows-

- I get a good night's sleep every day.
- I do regular exercise/meditation/listen music for relaxation.
- I spent time with family/friends.
- I enjoy my hobby.
- I eat healthy diet daily.

Students are taught beneficial habits in the areas of health, wellness, and stress management, including getting a good night's sleep every night. Maintaining health requires regularly engaging in relaxation methods including breathing exercises, yoga, pranayama, and meditation, picking up a hobby, and eating a healthy diet. Learners' physical and mental health are fostered by taking part in such activities and helping for general growth.

According to the S.O.A.R. Program at Maryland Community College, Developing Effective Study Habits, (2002) some students succeed academically with little to no effort, while other students put in a lot of effort but didn't achieve enough success. Although mastering the best study techniques is crucial, this achievement is not correlated with IQ (Intelligent Quotient) or

inherited traits. Effective study techniques can be learned, but this process requires self-motivation and progresses step by step. Self-evaluation was the first step, followed by learning the best study techniques, practising them every day, and eventually making them habits. Success in school is correlated with effective study techniques (Proctor et al., 2006). Higher education requires different study skills than those learned in schools. Various study techniques are crucial for higher education.

According to Azad et al., (2012), 167 (77%) students thought it was very important for academic study, which is similar to the current study, where 82 % students have the same opinion because they were not aware of this tool.

According to several research, students' exam scores can be improved by reading textbooks and taking notes, assessing one's own knowledge, and practising frequently (Gurung, 2005; Shetty & Srinivasan, 2014).

Undergraduate dental students' study skills were reviewed, and it was found that their levels were lower than those in the current study (Zarshenas et al., 2014). In a different study, it was discovered that self-evaluation enhances one's capacity for critical thinking (D Abdullah et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

Students' study skills vary depending on their academic level. Study methods help pupils gain self-assurance and confidence, which ultimately fosters active learning. Strong study skills enable students to set objectives, make plans, start working right away, stay on target, and achieve those goals methodically. Therefore, self-assessment of study skills of dental students is a tool to upgrade healthcare students' performance.

SUGGESTIONS

When a student is admitted to a healthcare institution, they should receive instruction in pertinent study techniques in order to aid them in improving their academic performance. This

can be incorporated into the curriculum such that all stakeholders are required to improve students' academic performance for their holistic development.

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