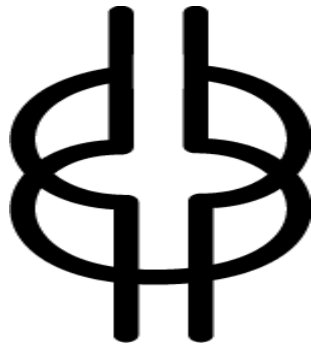


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NYANSAPO – "Wisdom Knot"

Symbol of wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence and patience

# **Improving the Study Behaviour of Ghanaian Senior High School Students through Counselling**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the importance of study skills counselling, students in Ghana are not explicitly taught how to study. This study, therefore, explored the effects of study skills counselling on the study behaviour of senior high school students in the Ho Municipality of Ghana. The quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test control group design was adopted for the study. The target population of the study consisted of all senior high school form one students. A sample of 40 respondents was selected through the simple random sampling technique. A study behaviour inventory was used in gathering the data. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using independent samples t-test. The findings revealed that study skills counselling significantly improved the study behaviour of participants when compared with the control group. It was also discovered that study skills counselling had significant effects on all the five components of study behaviour at post-test. In contrast, the results indicated that gender did not have significant influence on study behaviour at post-test. Based on the findings, it was recommended that study skills counselling be adopted as a viable approach for improving study behaviour among senior school students so as to enhance their academic achievement. Implications for counselling were also provided.

**Key words:** Study skills; counselling; study behaviour; quasi-experimental; senior high school students.

## **Introduction**

Study behaviour or habit is one important factor influencing the academic performance of students. Good study behaviour facilitates academic success while poor study behaviour retards it (Awabil, Kolo, Bello & Oliagba, 2013b). The world over, effective study behaviour is the gateway to academic success. Poor study behaviour can bar even bright students from many important opportunities that would otherwise enable them to realize their potential. Experiences at the senior school level have shown that studying presents problems to students in various forms. Most students have the eagerness to study but do not know how to study effectively. This implies that students need counselling in their studying efforts (Musingafi & Zebron, 2014). Ogbodo (2010) also observed that the major problem contributing to students' poor performance in tests and examinations is lack of proper study behaviour. For students to form good study behaviour there is the need to teach them effective study skills.

It is important to note that study skills are not synonymous with study behaviour. According to Crede and Kuncel (2008), study skills refer to the student's knowledge of appropriate study strategies and methods and the ability to manage time and other resources to meet the demands of academic tasks, whereas study behaviour typically denotes the degree to which the student engages in regular acts of studying that are characterised by appropriate studying routines (e.g. reviews of materials and self-testing) occurring in an environment that is conducive to studying. Bliss and Mueller (1987) had earlier distinguished between the two terms. They posited that study skills are the potentials for action while study behaviours are the observed actions themselves. A student may have all the skills required, that is, he or she may be able to take good notes in class (possession of a study skill) but simply sit in class doodling (lack of a study behaviour).

Furthermore, Kerka (as cited in Awabil, 2016) defined study skills as learning strategies that help students organise, process, and use information effectively. Gettinger and Seibert (2002) also stated that study skills are viewed as academic enablers; they function as critical tools for learning. Kagu (2001) cited a number of important study skills such as planning and organising time for study, concentrating during hours of study, note-taking and use of library. Awabil (2016) also cited consultation, reading, writing, and finding and organising information,

time management, note-taking and test-taking as the necessary skills for good academic performance.

Awabil (as cited in Awabil, 2016) opined that study skills counselling is a technique which exposes students to effective study strategies in order to facilitate the development of good study behaviour. Gettinger and Seibert (as cited in Awabil, 2016) have indicated that effective study skills instruction can promote academic excellence. They cited four importance of study skills counselling as indicated below:

1. Through study skills counselling or instruction, students become more efficient, thoughtful and independent learners.
2. Even students who develop study skills on their own can learn to study more effectively and efficiently through explicit instruction.
3. Generally, study skills counselling has been shown to improve academic performance.
4. Research indicates that students require explicit instruction in study skills; individuals assigned randomly to control conditions tend not to acquire or use study strategies on their own without training (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).

Despite the importance of study skills counselling, students in Ghana are not explicitly taught how to study. Teachers present their lessons without providing students with the methods to use in mastering the information taught. A major reason why students are not taught how to study could be due to the mistaken belief that students can learn effectively without receiving instruction on study skills. But it is not every student who can attain academic success without explicit instruction on study skills. A student may have the academic ability to benefit from formal education but may not know how to study effectively. The lack of training on study skills has adversely affected the academic performance of students in schools, colleges and universities (Awabil, 2016). The case of students in senior high schools in the Ho Municipality in the Volta Region is no exception. For instance, in 2013, only 14.5 % and 38 % of the students in Shia Senior High School and Sokode Senior High School in the Ho Municipality qualified to apply for admission into tertiary institutions respectively (Ho Municipal Education Office, 2014). Although factors such as inadequate motivation for teachers, low motivation for learning and

emotional problems contribute to poor academic performance, poor study behaviour has been consistently identified by researchers (e.g. Azeez as cited in Kagu, 2001; Yahaya, 2003) as the most important factor. Therefore, an improvement of the study behaviour of students in these schools through counselling may translate into better academic performance.

In addition, several experimental studies have been conducted in Nigeria (e.g. Yahaya, 2005; Olayinka, 2008; Ohanaka & Ofuani, 2010; Abdullahi, Atsua, Amudu & Ago, 2013) to improve study behaviour of senior high school students using counselling with the view to enhancing academic achievement. But in Ghana, it appears no experimental study has been carried out to improve study behaviour of students at the senior high school level. Studies done on study behaviour among senior high school students, for example, Quist, Nyarko-Sampson and Essuman (2006), Quist and Nyarko-Sampson (2006), Mensah-Okyere, Atta and Essuman (2007) and Akagah (2011) are descriptive, non-experimental in nature. The current study is experimental in nature, thereby bridging the gap identified.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the effect of study skills counselling on the broad study behaviour of students;
2. ascertain the effect of study skills counselling on each of the components ( i.e. time management, concentration, note-taking, consultation, reading and library use) of student study behaviour;
3. find out the influence of gender on the broad study behaviour of participants in the experimental group.

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. There is no significant effect of study skills counselling on the study behaviour of students.
2. There is no significant effect of study skills counselling on the five (5) components (i.e. time management, concentration, note-

taking, consultation, reading and library use) of student study behaviour.

3. There is no significant difference in the study behaviour of participants in the experimental group on the basis of gender.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

A pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental control group design was adopted for the study. According to Kolo (2003), the quasi-experimental design involves the manipulation of one or more independent variables, but there is no random assignment of subjects to conditions. The design of this study comprised two groups. The first group constituted the experimental group and, therefore, was exposed to study skills counselling while the second group which served as the control group was not.

### **Population**

The target population of this study comprised all senior high school form one students in the Ho Municipality while the accessible population was made up of all Form 1 students in two Schools, namely, Sokode Senior High School and Shia Senior High School. The target and accessible population were 8,978 and 569 respectively.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting two schools out of the seven available for the study. A study behaviour inventory was administered to all form one students in the two schools. Out of 165 students who met the inclusion criterion (i.e. those who scored 101 or above on the inventory), 40 were randomly selected to constitute the sample using simple random sampling. Each group had 20 participants (10 males and 10 females). Before undertaking the study, the researchers obtained ethical clearance from the Ethical Review Board of the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Other ethical issues observed included informed consent and confidentiality.

### **Instrumentation**

The Study Behaviour Inventory (SBI) was used to generate pre-test and post-test scores on study behaviour of the students. The SBI was adapted from the Study Habit Survey developed by Essuman (2006). Five out of the 10 scales were used for the study. The SBI consisted of 40 items with a 5-point Likert-type scale of Very True=5, True=4, Somewhat True=3, Not True=2 and Not At All True=1. The five scales of the SBI were time management, concentration, consultation, note-taking, reading and use of library. A score of 101 or above is an indication that an individual has deficient study behaviour. The interpretation is that the higher the mean score the poorer the study behaviour and vice versa. The face and content validity of the SBI was ascertained by experts in guidance and counselling at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The instrument was administered to 30 senior high school students outside the study area so as to estimate the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.89.

### **Treatment Procedure**

There was pre-test and post-test in the study for both the control and the experiment group. After the pre-test phase, a treatment was applied to the experimental group to improve students' study behaviour while the control group did not receive any form of treatment. After 8 weeks of introducing the treatment to the experiment group, both the control and the experiment group were subjected to a post-test to determine the effect of the treatment on study behaviour. The treatment procedure had three components, namely, pre-treatment, treatment and post-treatment phases.

### **Pre-treatment Phase**

During the pre-treatment phase, the SBI was administered to all the form one students in the two senior high schools. The researchers found that 165 met the inclusion criterion as indicated earlier. Forty students were randomly selected and put into two groups, 20 each (10 males and 10 females) according to their schools.

### **Treatment Phase**

There were eight counselling sessions in all. The researchers carried out the counselling sessions for one hour twice in a week for

eight consecutive weeks. The details of each session have been spelt out below:

**Session 1:** Establishing the counselling relationship

The issues dealt with were rapport building, objectives of the counselling intervention, and setting rules to govern behaviour during the sessions.

**Session 2:** Time management

This session focused on counselling students on time management. Participants were allowed to discuss the problems associated with managing their study time. In addition, the researchers together with the participants discussed the purpose of effective time management and ways of improving time management.

**Session 3:** Concentration

To introduce concentration as a study skill, participants were asked to mention where they prefer to study and give reasons. The researchers assisted the participants to discuss effective ways of concentrating during study.

**Session 4:** Note-taking

Participants were asked to brainstorm on the concept of note-taking. The researchers helped them to discuss the purpose of note-taking. Participants were also introduced to methods of note-taking. The researchers asked participants to take notes in a subject area of their choice and bring up for discussion in the next session.

**Session 5:** Use of library

Participants were made to share their experiences regarding the purposes of libraries and strategies they employ in making use of the school library. After sharing their experiences, the researchers assisted them to identify effective strategies for using the library.

**Session 6:** Consultation

Participants were asked to explain consultation. After that they were made to outline their sources of support whenever they encounter academic challenges. Steps to be followed when consulting peers, teachers and parents were stated and discussed.

**Session 7:** Reading

The researchers elicited from participants the strategies they use to read. After that they were guided on the use of the SQ3R technique so as to promote effective reading among participants. SQ3R stands for survey, question, read, recite and revise or review.



**Session 8:** Review of past sessions

During this session participants were helped to review the preceding sessions before the entire intervention was evaluated. Participants were encouraged to practice the skills taught.

**Post-treatment Phase**

Two weeks after the study skills counselling, the SBI was re-administered to participants so as to collect post-test data from the groups. The objective was to determine the effects of the treatment on the study behaviour of participants.

**Method of Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using the independent samples t-test. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

**Results**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant effect of study skills counselling on the study behaviour of students.

The purpose of this hypothesis was to find out whether significant difference exists between the experimental and control group on study behaviour at post-test. This hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Independent samples t-test of Post-test Scores of Control and Experimental Groups**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control	20	127.1	30.92	38	7.153	.000
Experimental	20	81.15	18.79			

Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 1 shows that the p value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance which indicates that there is a significant effect of study skills counselling on study behaviour at post-test ( $t = 7.153$ ,  $df = 38$ ,  $p = .000$ , 2-tailed). As a result of this, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding means that the experimental group has improved significantly in their study behaviour when compared with the control group.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant effect of study skills counselling on the five (5) components (i.e. time management, concentration, note-taking, consultation, reading and library use) of student study behaviour.

The objective of this hypothesis was to determine whether significant difference exists between the experimental and control groups on each of the five dimensions of study behaviour at post-test. Independent samples t-test was used to test hypothesis 2. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Independent samples t-test on Post-test Scores of Control and Experimental Groups on the basis of five components of study behaviour**

Dimensions	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Time Management	Control	20	27.95	5.91	38	7.351	.000
	Experimental	20	16.50	3.69			
Concentration	Control	20	24.95	6.53	38	5.523	.000
	Experimental	20	15.65	3.76			
Note Taking	Control	20	24.90	7.35	38	4.925	.000
	Experimental	20	15.70	3.98			
Consultation	Control	20	25.35	5.88	38	5.490	.000
	Experimental	20	16.35	4.38			
Reading and Library Use	Control	20	23.95	5.25	38	5.188	.000
	Experimental	20	16.95	2.98			

Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that across all the five components of students' study behaviour, the p values are less than the 0.05 level of significance implying that there are significant differences in the mean scores on all dimensions of study behaviour between the experimental and control groups at post-test. In view of this, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of study skills counselling across the five components of study behaviour is rejected. This result means that the

experimental group has improved greatly in all components of study behaviour when compared with the control group.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the study behaviour of participants in the experimental group on the basis of gender.

The purpose of this hypothesis was to find out whether significant difference exists in the study behaviour of participants in the experimental group at post-test on the basis of gender. In testing this hypothesis, the independent samples t-test was computed to ascertain whether significant difference exists. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Independent samples t-test on Post-test Scores of Experimental Group on the basis of Gender**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Male	10	78.40	6.910	18	-.874	.394
Female	10	84.10	5.183			

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the study behaviour of participants in the experimental group on the basis of gender at post-test ( $t = -.874$ ,  $df = 18$ ,  $p = .394$ , 2-tailed), since the  $p$  value of 0.394 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis is retained. It, therefore, means that gender is not a significant determinant of students' study behaviour.

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that significant difference exists between the experimental and control groups on study behaviour at post-test. This finding confirms the findings of Kagu (as cited in Kagu, 2004), Olayinka (2008) and Awabil, Kolo, Bello, and Oliagba (2013a) who found that there was a significant difference between the post-test scores of participants in the control and experimental groups regarding study behaviour. Again, the findings are consistent with the findings of Awabil, Kolo, Bello and Oliagba (2013b) who studied the effect of study skills counselling on the five dimensions of the study behaviour, namely, time management, note-taking, concentration, consultation, reading and library use and discovered that there were significant differences in the post-test scores of the control and experimental

groups across the five components of study behaviour. The reason for the current finding could be due to the fact that participants strongly desired to improve their academic performance through the acquisition of good study behaviour.

The result further showed that there is no significant difference in the mean scores on study behaviour at post-test with respect to gender. The findings of the current study are in line with the findings of Awabil et al., (2013a) that there was no significant difference between the study behaviour of male and female participants in the experimental group at post-test. In a similar vein, the findings of the current study give support to the findings of Kagu (2003) and Ohanaka and Ofuani (2010) that there was no significant difference in the post-test scores on the study behaviour of male and female students. The reason for this finding may be as a result of the fact both genders had similar level of motivation to receive counselling to improve their study behaviour, hence the lack of significant difference. The implication is that gender is not a barrier to counselling on study behaviour, since neither of the sexes responded significantly different to the counselling intervention.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following conclusions and recommendations are made.

Study skills counselling is effective in improving study behaviour. Again, gender is not a significant determinant of the study behaviour of students. It is recommended that counsellors should organise study skills counselling for students to enable them to improve their study behaviour so as to enhance their academic performance. Teachers should also provide study skills instruction to students on time management, concentration, note-taking, consultation, reading and library use and other study strategies with the view to improving student study behaviour. It is also recommended that study skills counselling can be carried out without gender consideration, since gender did not have significant influence on study behaviour at post-test.

### **Implications for counselling**

The current findings have a number of implications for the practice of counselling and the education of counsellors. Since the counselling intervention was effective, counsellors should adopt the treatment plan in order to improve study behaviour in schools, colleges and universities. Again, counsellors should organise seminars and workshops on study skills for teachers with the view to equipping them with knowledge and skills on how to improve study behaviour. Consequently, teachers would be able to assist in the provision of effective study skills training for students. Finally, study skills should be included in the curricula of counsellors and teachers so that upon completion they could transfer the skills to their students.

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