The Relationship between Study Habits and Academic Performance: A Case of University of Cape Coast Distance Learners

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Abstract

This paper examined the relationship between study habits and the academic performance of students on the University of Cape Coast distance education programme. A Study Habits Inventory for Distance Learners (SHIDL) was used to collect data. A total of 879 participants took part in the study. ANOVA, t-test of independence, and Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient were used in analyzing the data. The results showed that a statistically significant relationship exists between study habits and academic performance of distance learners on one hand and mode of preparing assignments on the other hand. It is therefore concluded that successful academic performance depends on the development of good study habits. By implication, academic counseling needs to be focused on good study habits.

It is the wish of every student to accomplish his/her goals in education. While in school, the goal of students may be to pass a certain number of courses to obtain a degree. For any student to achieve this goal calls for the development of good study habits that will lead him/her to academic success. To develop good study habits is a complex phenomenon. But the basic truth is that effective study skills must be practiced in order to improve academic performance.

Many students are tempted to find excuses for their inability to perform creditably in their academic endeavours. The case of distance learners on University of Cape Coast programmes is even more serious. They always complain about heavy work load, lack of time to study, interference from family members, financial constraints, and a host of other

problems. While some students are making frantic efforts to study by cultivating effective study habits, others want to sail through without much effort. The question that arises is: Is there any relationship between study habits and academic performance of distance learners?

Much has been written about study habits; the topic is a popular one and it is discussed from multiple perspectives. Literature has revealed that many different terminologies have been given to this concept, some of which include "the art of learning", "effective study", "approaches to learning", "learning styles" and many others (Ezewu 1987; Anim 1994; Pintrich 1995 and Kizlik 1997)

Conceptually, the term study habit is defined as a well-planned and deliberate effort towards understanding and acquiring knowledge. Oloyede and Olatoye (2005) citing Okoye (1981) described study habit as a systematic conscious task of acquiring specific knowledge geared towards a set of standards. Pintrich and Garas (1991) see study habits as behaviours that are easily manifested without conscious exertion on the part of the learner. They are behaviours directed at effective learning. These behaviours are usually manifested in the learners' response to class work, assignments, reading, note taking, concentration, and time management, consultation with teachers and other learners and tactics used in examination (Ezewu 1987; Isangedighi 1997; Umoinyang 1999).

Individuals employ some skills in studying. These skills are related to when, where, and how to study. They are also reflected in the management of study time and the preparation of assignment response. Unconsciously, these skills are practiced overtime to the extent that they become part and parcel of the individual. When these skills persist overtime, they become habitual; hence the idea of study habit. Study habit can be either positive or negative. It is positive when it helps in promoting effective learning and negative when it retards learning. Study habit, therefore, is a good predictor of learning outcomes in schools. Odinko and Ademoye (1999) reported that study habit significantly predicts students' attitude towards English Language.

The primary role of the distance education student is to learn. Under the best circumstances, this challenge requires motivation, planning, and the ability to analyze and apply the information at distance education setting. The process of learning for distance students is more complex than students on the regular programme. For example, Schuemer (1993) observed that that

many distance students are older, have jobs and families which influence their studies. They are equally faced with lack of motivational factors of learning such as contact or competition with other students. It also takes them a longer time to establish rapport with their course tutors because they do not interact with them often. During face-to-face contact, many distance learners feel very uncomfortable with their learning situation.

Distance education learners, especially the beginners, may have some difficulty determining what the demands of a university study actually are because they do not have the support of an immediate peer group, the instructor, or familiarity with the technology being used for delivery of distance education materials. Morgan (1991) noted that those who are not confident about their learning tend to concentrate on memorizing facts in order to complete assignments and write examinations. As a result, they end up with poor understanding of materials.

Bunch-Keemer (2002) asserted that as a student, the key to successful time management is to first develop good study habits. He stated further that the keys to successful study habits are taking control, prioritizing and scheduling time realistically. The use of downtime (breaktime) between classes to go over notes, study an hour or two a day, and slowly build onto study time as an exam approaches are excellent study habits. He cautioned students to schedule their time so that their objectives for studying are met and they must also have prioritized time for work, study, and relaxation.

On using time effectively, Debbie (1998) thought the freedom to do what you want with your time is an intoxicating thing. This is because college students are not forced by anyone to go to class, study, or do homework. However, the effects of making poor choices in time management soon catch up with them. In effect, effective use of time brings success, not only academically but in all areas of life. Anim (1994) in a study of some determinants of study skills found that girls' study habits on time management were less satisfactory than boys. He attributed this to socio-cultural factors in Ghana which stressed on boys having formal education than girls.

Various theoretical formulations explain study habits of students. Witkin's (1950) concept of field dependent and field independent are used to describe how students develop learning styles. Again, a further probe into academic success, is for the student to understand his/her learning style and

how best to learn. How students absorb and process information depends –
whether they are verbal learners, visual learners, oral learners, au▪
learners, tactile and kinesthetic learners, or some mix thereof (Koryb▪
2004). Explaining further, Korybut said verbal learners learn best throu▪
written materials, like textbooks and articles. Visual learners learn by seei▪
or picturing information and recalling a mental image of it. Oral learne▪
learn by talking out their ideas. They tend to speak more frequently in cla_
than other students, and profit from student study groups where they c≡
discuss what they have read. Aural learners learn by listening ▪
information. They like class lectures and small group discussions, listenic
in class more than taking notes, and even taping classes. Finally, he sa▪
tactile and kinesthetic learners learn by touching, by doing and b
movement. They tend to learn well from role-playing, clinical experience
internships and interactive on-line instruction.

Research has established that students who study in a clear
organized environment with supplies can best concentrate on their work an
accomplish their tasks efficiently. Kizlik (2005) supported this b
suggesting that one can study anywhere, but obviously, some places a▪
better than others. Students are to choose a good physical environment ▪
part of study habits. The locations of some distance learners in Ghana a▪
more advantageous than others. But the onus lies on the students who a▪
resident at difficult geographical areas to make the best out of the situation.

Logan (1995) advised all students to set priorities and not put o▪
things that must be done. To him, procrastination is a common human tra
that can be disastrous and that students who manage their activities b
continual crisis put themselves under continual high stress. ·Evidence in th
literature suggests that it is better to make a daily or weekly schedule b
planning time for class, work, study times/study breaks, extracurricul▪
activities, meals, exercise, personal time and sleep. Scheduling person▪
time is essential just as planning and recognizing the need for personal tim
eliminates guilt (Logan 1995).

A research conducted by Anim (1994) on some determinants of study habi▪
among students in Senior Secondary Schools in Ghana, generally, foun
boys showing satisfaction in study habits than girls; girls on the other han▪
scored higher in note taking and reading. This study corroborates Fritz
(1992) studies where females scored higher than males in reading.

Literature on study habits revealed interesting results. Kumar (1996), in a study of Indian Open University of distance learners, found significant differences in the study habits of distance learners when compared on the basis of marital status, social class, academic stream, employment status, and experience in distance learning. In another study in the USA, the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] (1994) found that there is a positive relationship between good study habits and academic performance in history and geography. The results show that the better students perform academically, the more likely they are to discuss their studies at home every day and again, better performing students were also likely to read more than 70 pages a day. By implication, distance learners who discuss their assignments at home are likely to perform better academically.

A synthesis of all the research literature on study habits point to the fact that good study habit correlates positively with high academic performance. In effect, positive study habits are predictors of success in school. Learners possess different study habits and that influences the level of comfort in educational settings. Nevertheless, distance learners must develop the appropriate study habits that are likely to accelerate their learning.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to determine the relationship between study habits and academic performance of distance learners. Apart from investigating the extent to which study habits impact on academic performance of distance learners, the researchers examined the differences in the study habits of the different categories of distance learners. For example, marital status, programmes being pursued, and age.

Hypothesis

In the light of the problem stated, the following research hypotheses were formulated and tested:

1. Ho: There is no statistically significant relationship between study habits and the academic performance of distance learners.

   Ho: There is no statistically significant difference in the study habits of married and unmarried distance learners.

2. Ho: There is no statistically significant difference between the study habits of Basic Education and Business students pursuing the distance education programmes.

3.   Ho: There is no statistically significant difference among the study habits of distance learners below 30 years of age, between 30 – 50 years and those above 50 years.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from level 200 and 300' distance education students of the University of Cape Coast. Going by the study centre lists provided by the Centre for Continuing Education, UCC, there were about 6097 level 200 and 300 students. Levels 100 and 400 were left out because they were either very new to the system or too busy with their project work. Both stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used with the focus on factors such as marital status, programme being pursued, and age were used to select respondents. Five hundred and forty five (62.0%) were level 200 students while 334 (38.0%) were level 300 students. Ashanti region had 207 respondents while Central and Eastern had 116 and 121 respectively. The number selected from Volta and Western regions were 102 and 118 respectively while Brong Ahafo recorded 88 respondents. The number selected from Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions were 65, 23, 19 and 20 in that order. In all 879 undergraduate students in all the 10 regional centres in Ghana participated in the study bearing in mind the ratio of students' distribution in all the regions.

Five hundred and twenty one (59.3%) of the sample were males while 358 (40.7%) were females. Thus, in the study, there were more males in the sample than females. Regarding their age distribution, 467 (53.1%) were between 30 – 50 years old while 339 (38. 5%) were below 30 years of age. Only 73 (8.3%) were above 50 years. Seven 'hundred and sixteen respondents (81.5%) were pursuing the Diploma in Basic Education programme while the rest 163 (18.5%) were pursuing the Business programme. On marital status, 690 (78.5%) were married while 189 (21.5%) were unmarried. It was against this background that the main data were analyzed to determine the relationship between study habits and academic performance of distance learners.

Instrument

A Study Habits Inventory for Distance Learners (SHIDL) which was developed, after an extensive literature review, was used for the study. Both

open and close ended items featured in the instrument. Most of the items were structured on a five point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), no opinion (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The higher the score, the higher the relationship between study habits and academic performance. The SHIDL instrument was in two parts. The first part was the biographic section which requested information on gender, age, year level, level at which one teaches, programme being pursued, and marital status. The second part had five sub sections labeled A to E and measured five critical areas of study habit. Sub section A on time management contained 14 items while sub section B on 'when to study' had 15 items. The other three sub sections are (C) 'where to study' (12 items); (D) 'how to study' (27 items) and (E) 'preparing assignment response' (22 items). The last item under each sub section was open-ended and requested respondents to list 3 other things they did but not mentioned in the section.

The instrument was pre-tested at Akatsi Study Centre and that helped to modify items which were not very clear. The inventory had a reliability co-efficient alpha of 0.84. A master sheet bearing the registered number of respondents was prepared and used to collect information regarding the academic performance of the students from the Assessment Unit of Centre for Continuing Education. The scores were entered against the responses of each participant. The scores of the second semester in English and Mathematics were used for the Education students while Management II and Law of Contract II for the Business students were used because they are core courses taken by all students on the two programmes. The average scores in the two subject areas were used to determine the academic performance for each student. Different academic subject areas were used to determine the academic performance of the two categories of students because they do not do the same courses. However, it is envisaged that irrespective of the programme being pursued, the development of effective study habits is likely to positively affect academic performance.

Procedure

The SHIDL instrument was administered on Sundays' Face-to-Face sessions during break before the On-Centre Teaching Practice for Education students and additional tutorials for Business students. Sunday was chosen because we did not want to interfere in the tutorial sessions that preceded the written quiz on Sunday morning. The instruments were administered by

the Resident Tutors assigned to the various centres. They were, however, assisted by the Centre Co-ordinators.

The selected sample was grouped in one large lecture hall and ☐ essence of the study explained to them. They responded to the questionna⬛ and handed it in on the same day. This process was adopted and that help⬛ to achieve high return rate. The responses of the students were coded a⬛ the scores obtained were analyzed using percentages, means, and standa⬛ deviation. Independent t-test was used to determine the level of differe⬛ between the study habits of married and unmarried and DBE and DⰒ programmes respectively. On the other hand, inter-correlational matrix w⬛ employed to examine the relationship between study habits and academ⬛ performance. ANOVA was used to determine the difference among a⬛ groupings of respondents.

Results

It was hypothesized that there is no statistically significant relationsh⬛ between study habits and the academic performance of distance learners. Table 1 presents the analysis of the comparison

Table 1: Inter-Correlational Matrix for Study Habits which affect Academ⬛ Performance of Distance Learner

SN	Variables	Academic performance	Time management	When to study	Where to study	How to study	Preparing assignment	Total Study Habi
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Academic performance	1.000	-.025	.016	-.005	.003	.070*	.617*
2	Time Management		1.000	.617**	.343**	.420**	.355**	.683*
3	When to study			1.000	.474**	.484**	.425**	.76-3'
4	Where to study				1.000	.438**	.333**	.614'
5	How to study					1.000	.486**	.79⬛
6	Preparing Assignment						1.000	.792'
7	Total Study Habit							1.00⬛

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 – tailed)

* *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

Table 1 shows several correlations of the variables for study habits of distant learners. Academic performance was significantly associated with preparing assignments, (r = .070: p< 0.01). This means that although there was a relationship between academic performance and mode of preparing assignments it was low. Furthermore, the correlation of academic performance with time management and how to study show values of .003 and .025 respectively which are interpreted as very low, virtually no relationship. On the other hand, academic performance correlated negatively with when to study (r = - . 016; p < .05) just like where to study (r = - .005; p < .05). This inverse relationship indicated that high academic performance has nothing to do with when and where one studies.

Time management as a study habit also correlated with how to study positively showing a medium relationship (r = .420; p < .01) while in the case of when to study it had a high relationship (r = .617; p < .01). The same variable correlated with where to study and preparing assignments showed a definite positive relationship but the relationship was low (r = .343; p < .01) and (r = .355; p < .01) respectively. On its part when to study correlated positively showing a medium relationship with where to study (r = .474; p < .01), how to study (r = .484; p < .01) and preparing assignments (r = .425; p < .01)

Similarly, where to study showed positive medium relationship when correlated with how to study, (r = .438; p < .01). However, the relationship between where to study and preparing assignments, even though positive, is low (r = .333; p < .01). How to study correlated with preparing assignments (r = .486; p < .01) which is a positive medium relationship. Finally, the study has shown that total study habits. correlated with academic performance (r = .617; p < .01). This shows a high relationship between study habits and academic performance.

The second hypothesis was that there is no statistically significant difference in the study habits of married and unmarried distance learners. This view was informed by the assertion that married couples have too many commitments that do not allow them to cultivate good study habits.

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the study habits based on marital status. Table 2: Independent t-test Analysis of Differences in Study Habits of Married and Unmarried distance learners

Variable	Married (n=690)		Unmarried (n=189)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t value	P
Time management	34.28	5.61	33.96	5.52	.687	.701
When to study	41.12	6.44	40.60	6.20	.996	.555
Where to study	27.71	4.14	27.50	4.39	.618	.243
How to study	59.65	9.30	59.67	9.60	-.028	.953
Preparing Assignment	64.10	11.01	63.44	12.37	.701	.028*
Total Study Habit	226.86	27.50	225.17	28.50	.739	.389

*p <. 05

The analysis shown in Table 2 revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between married and unmarried distance learners in terms of time management, t (879) = .687, p < .701; when to study, t (879) = .996, p < .555; where to study, t (879) = .618, p < .243; and how to study, t (879) = .028, p < .953. However, statistically significant difference was recorded in terms of mode of preparing assignments, t (879) = .701, p < .028. This result shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the study habits of married and unmarried distance learners. The difference is in the mode of preparing assignments. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

It was also hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference between the study habits of Basic Education and Business students pursuing the distance education programmes. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent t-test Analysis of Differences in Study Habits between DBE and DBS distance learners

Variable	DBE (n=716)		DBS (n=163)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t value	P
Time management	34.50	5.42	32.91	6.09	3.317	.056
When to study	41.30	6.22	39.71	6.97	2.882	.015 *
Where to study	27.78	4.10	27.13	4.55	1.788	.083
How to study	59.87	9.17	58.69	10.20	1.455	.774
Preparing Assignment	64.44	11.18	61.84	11.67	2.653	.149
Total Study Habit	227.91	27.04	220.28	29.77	3.185	.120

*$p < .05$

Evidence in Table 3 suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the study habits of Basic Education and Business students in terms of time management, t (879) = 3.317, p < 056; where to study, t (879) = 1.788, p < .083; how to study, t (879) = 1.455, p <.774; and preparing assignment, t (879) = 2.653, p < .149. However, statistically significant difference was noted in terms of when to study. It is concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in the study habits of distance learners pursuing Basic Education and Business programmes. The difference is in when to study. The research hypothesis is, therefore, rejected.

Another hypothesis formulated for the study was that there is no statistically significant difference among the study habits of distance learners below 30 years of age, between 30 – 50 years and those above 50

years. The results of the analysis based on this age groupings is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Rating of Study Habits of three age range groupings of distant learners

Variables of Study Habits	Below 30 years (n = 339)		30-50 yrs (n = 467)		Above 50 yrs (n = 73)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	P value
Time management	33.86	5.73	34.36	5.52	34.93	5.30	1.451	.235
When to study	40.51	6.70	41.39	6.19	40.85	6.09	1.907	.149
Where to study	27.32	4.25	27.81	4.20	28.36	3.73	2.426	.089
How to study	59.59	9.00	59.46	9.08	61.18	12.27	1.072	.343
Preparing Assignments	63.89	11.97	63.58	10.89	66.67	10.61	2.375	.094

*p < .05

Table 4 shows that the difference among the three age groupings in time management, $F (2, 879) = 1.451$, $p < .235$; when to study, $F (2, 879) = 1.907$, $p < .149$; and where to study, $F (2, 879) = 2.426$, $p < .089$; were statistically not significant. Similarly, the difference among the age groups in how to study, $F (2, 879) = 1.072$, $p < .343$ and mode of preparing assignments, $F (2, 879) = 2.375$, $p < .094$; were also not statistically significant. The null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference among the study habits of distance learners in terms of age groupings is, therefore, accepted.

Discussion

The first hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between study habits and academic performance of distance learners was only partially supported. The findings showed low relationship between academic performance and mode of preparing assignments, time management, and how to study. This study corroborates the study conducted in the USA by the National Assessment of Educational Progress NAEP (1994) that there is a positive relationship between good study habits and academic performance in history and geography. On the other hand, the inverse relationship found between high academic performance and when and where to study conforms to the suggestion that one can study anywhere, but obviously, some places are better than others (Kizlik, 2005).

Distance learners are scattered all over in the ten regions of Ghana. One can appreciate the difficulties that some of the learners face especially in deprived areas of the country. Certain areas are poorly developed lacking basic utility services such as electricity and water. Some areas are just anti educo-genic, yet, all distance learners are expected to study and pass their examination. While the above explanation appears persuasive and tenable, it is important to note that the generally low correlation observed implies that distance learners are likely to adopt their own unique study habits which eventually are likely not to be helpful enough in their academic performance.

The study has brought into focus marital status, programme pursued and age as important intervening variables in determining the extent to which distance learners' study habits affect their academic performance in Ghana. It has emerged from the results that significant difference exists in the study habits of married and unmarried distance learners in the variable on preparing assignment. The findings also revealed that significant difference exists between distance learners pursuing Basic Education and Business programmes on the variable when to study.

While we reject hypotheses 2 and 3 on the basis of differences in the variables as preparing assignments and when to study, hypothesis 4 is however accepted that no significant difference exists among the age groupings of distance learners on time management, when to study, where to study, how to study, and mode of preparing assignments.

The results are quite intriguing as the finding supports what Kumar (1996) stated in his study that significant difference exists in the study

habits of distance learners when compared on the basis of marital statu social class, academic stream, employment status, and experience distance learning. The results give enough grounds to conclude that mari status, programme pursued and age account for students cultivating differe study habits.

It is quite fascinating to understand the dynamics of the education environment in which Ghanaian students operate. Generally, distanc learners are the product of the socio-cultural and economic environment c the Ghanaian system. Finance, family, accommodation, transportatior religious commitment as well as demands of job performance are but som of the challenges that face the students. The findings, therefore, seem tc suggest that married and unmarried, Education and Business students have different modes of study in terms of assignments and when to study.

Conclusion

This research has produced evidence to show that there is a positive relationship between academic performance and study habits of distance learners. Since the relationship is high for the total study habits, the findings have given us hope to support the contention that good study habits are prerequisite for high academic performance. Again, this study clearly has established that no matter the location, one can pursue any academic degree by distance.   This has lent credence to the philosophy UCC has enshrined in the academic programmes of distance learners that one can obtain UCC degree by distance.   It has also been established that there is a close relationship between time management and how to study, where to study and preparing assignments and where to study. The contributions of the various variables considered in the study confirm the fact that for effective educational success to be achieved there is the need for distance learners to develop the skills that are essentially viable for their academic performance.

Implications

The research on study habits is an important avenue for assessing the modes of distance learners' styles for learning and interacting with the learning materials. A striking implication derived from a study like this re-affirm the belief that no matter the age level, students can perform academically. This implies that the programme can open itself to many

people irrespective of age. This is quite relevant as research has shown that normative data indicate that some types of skills stay at the same level or continue to increase throughout adulthood (Blanchard-Fields & Hess, 1996).

Secondly, the distance learners themselves must also make conscious effort at cultivating good study habits by paying particular attention to how they manage their time, when, where and how they study and finally show concern for the mode of preparing assignments. One way for students to build such a commitment for studies is for them to teach one another from their own successes that focus on which strategies worked and which did not work.

Again, it is reasonable to say that effective instruction and successful learning are not achieved by chance. This contention has stressed the fact that the University must help students learn how to set appropriate goals, which then, will form the foundation for developing good study habits. A corollary to the above is that institutions running distance education programmes should not assume that all is well with distance learners. They need to examine the causes of poor study habits of distance learners and try to eliminate those that can easily be dealt with.

Finally, the significant impact of study habits on the academic performance of distance learners as established by this study shows the supremacy of good study habits in striving to achieve academic excellence. To help low performing distance learners, Course Tutors are enjoined to intensify their academic counseling role with a focus on how to cultivate good study habits. It is envisaged that this will bring about meaningful learning habits and consequent high academic performance.

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