This descriptive study assessed the strengths and weaknesses in college students’ study skills as compared to other students across the country. Participants in this study included 40 students (27 women, 13 men, age $M = 19.3$, $SD = 1.07$) from a small, Christian liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States. The students completed the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (Weinstein, Palmer, & Shulte, 2002) and a demographic survey. Results of the study showed that the participants scored at or lower than the 50th percentile in each of the study skills categories, suggesting that these college students do not have appropriate study skills.

College students across the country try to juggle sports, extracurricular activities, and volunteer service during their school years, and almost two-thirds of college students also hold a job while enrolled in school (Young, 2002). These students seem to forget that they should actually consider going to college as their full-time job. In addition to the approximately 12 to 20 hours spent in class per week, students are expected to spend 2 hours on preparation for every hour spent in the classroom (Young, 2002). This equals 24 to 40 hours per week of outside class work for the typical full-time student. Very few students actually study that much. In a National Survey of Student Engagement, only 12 percent of participants reported studying 26 or more hours per week (Young, 2002). The majority of students (63%) stated they spent 15 or fewer hours per week on outside class work (Young, 2002).

Perhaps the reason for the lack of time spent studying is that many students have not learned appropriate study skills. Many schools across the country use study strategy testing to assess their incoming students in order to identify potential problem areas (Flowers, 2003). Glynn, Aultman, and Owens (2005) determined that many students enter college unaware of how to study strategically and, therefore, struggle needlessly in their classes.

Study strategies include several different factors that influence how well a student learns. In this study, the categories of study skills assessed included anxiety, attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, self-testing, the ability to select main ideas, use of support techniques and materials, time management, and test strategies for preparing for tests (Weinstein, Palmer, & Shulte, 2002).

Research has shown that students who learn and utilize study strategies consistently receive better grades compared to those who enter college without the knowledge of how to study (Kachgal, Hansen, & Nutter, 2001; Nist, 2002). VanZile-Tamsen and Livingston (1999) found that students who practice study strategies experience academic success and receive better grades. Tuckman (2003) found that students who participated in a strategy training course increased their grade-point averages (GPAs) by .48 points that quarter, while students who did not engage in a strategy training course only increased their GPAs by .02 points.

Study skills training courses seem very beneficial to students, but a study performed by Yuksel (2006) revealed that despite the benefits, many students do not want to participate in these classes. Students reported three basic reasons for this opposition: lack of desire to change study habits, lack of ability to change study habits, and the belief that new study skills seem pointless and cannot be taught (Yuksel, 2006).
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Most college freshmen (65%) say they spent five or fewer hours on homework per week as high school seniors (Young, 2002). Since students can only acquire study skills through experience, it is important to assign enough homework to teach such skills, but many researchers feel that elementary teachers assign too little homework for students to learn study strategies (Valentine, 2001). Currently, middle school teachers assign less than one hour of homework a week. Spending little time on homework for the first 12 years of one’s life in school is a habit difficult to reverse upon entering college.

While assessing study skills, this study served to raise student awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in study skills. The participants had the opportunity to learn whether or not they manage their time wisely, and they also had the opportunity to consider where they need to focus their energy to improve their study habits, which potentially could lead to improvement of their grades.

Method

Participants

The researcher sampled 40 undergraduate students (27 women, 13 men) at a small, Christian liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 (M = 19.3, SD = 1.07). Of the 40 participants studied, 39 reported being Caucasian, and 1 reported another race.

Instruments

I utilized The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI, Weinstein et al., 2002) and a demographic survey to assess study skills and personal characteristics including age and race. The LASSI, a paper and pencil survey, included 80 statements, such as “When it comes to studying, procrastination is a problem for me” and “During class discussions, I have trouble figuring out what is important enough to put in my notes.” The participants responded to the statements on a Likert scale by circling a letter from a to e (a = not at all typical of me, and e = very much typical of me) that best described them.

The LASSI (Weinstein et al., 2002) is scored by corresponding the participant’s response to each statement with a number (1-5) on the answer key. After recording the responses and computing the numbers, each study skills category yielded scores ranging from 8 to 40. A graph, included in the test booklet, showed participants the percentile in which their scores fell in relation to national norm. The norm group averaged 282 points for the total LASSI score.

Procedure

The research study took place at the college in a classroom. As participants arrived in the classroom at the designated time, the researcher handed each participant two copies of the informed consent and asked them to read it thoroughly. The participants then signed and returned one copy of the informed consent to the researcher and kept the other copy for themselves. The participants then received a demographic survey, the LASSI (Weinstein et al., 2002), and a pencil. I assured the participants that their anonymity would remain protected and that I would not associate the results of their LASSI with their names when I returned the LASSI to them.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study showed that the participants scored at or lower than the 50th percentile on average for each study skills category. The participants only averaged a score in the 50th percentile in
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the information processing category. Examples of information processing items on the LASSI include “To help me remember new principles we are learning in class, I practice applying them,” and “I try to find relationships between what I am learning and what I already know.” The participants scored the lowest (14th percentile) in the area of attitude and interest toward academic tasks. This subsection included items on the LASSI such as “I do not care about getting a general education, I just want to get a good job,” and “I only study the subjects I like.”

Participants averaged a total score of 261 on the LASSI, while the national norm scored 282, placing the total average in the 37th percentile.

Participants’ scores in relation to national norms

Limitations in the study occurred because the vast majority of the participants were college freshmen. Study skills seemed to improve with age in college.

Averages scores of participants by class

ANX- Anxiety
ATT- Attitude
CON- Concentration
INP- Information Processing
MOT- Motivation
SFT- Self-Testing
SMI- Selecting Main Ideas
STA- Support Techniques
TMT- Time Management
TST- Test Strategies
TOT- Total LASSI
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Although the graph shows study skills decreasing from juniors to seniors, it must be taken into account that only two seniors participated in this study.

Despite the decrease in study skills, a more even distribution of participants could drastically change the average score. Due to convenience sampling, many of the students shared similar characteristics, as they all came from the same school.

What can students and teachers then do to improve study skills? It appears that students need to learn study skills at an early age to benefit from them at the college level. Therefore, researchers have proposed that teachers begin instructing study strategy courses in elementary school and continue with instruction throughout elementary and high school years, with the courses adapting to the students’ growing needs (Yuksel, 2006).

Another thing that teachers can do to increase positive study habits involves giving the students verbal praise for completing the homework assigned. Often teachers, especially in college, will assign homework and never check for completion. This leaves many students feeling that the homework lacks importance and is not worth the time or effort. A study showed that students receiving verbal praise for the time spent on their homework continued to do more homework, whereas students receiving no verbal praise did less and less homework as the semester went on (Hancock, 2000). Students in the verbal praise group that did more homework also received better grades in the class than the others (Hancock, 2000).

Conclusions

Future research could focus on the difference in study skills in extrinsically and intrinsically motivated students. Intrinsically motivated students would more likely have better study skills due to their ability to motivate themselves and persist when difficult tasks occur. Further research might also conduct a descriptive comparative study comparing differences in study skills in males and females, and between freshmen and seniors.

A study could also be conducted focusing on the effectiveness of a study skills course taught before students enter college, showing whether or not early intervention helps increase amount of time spent on homework and improves grades. With a little determination from the students to change their study habits, and effort from the teachers to teach these necessary skills, college students will still know how to study for years to come.

References


