

The study skills dilemma

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Abstract

What exactly does one understand by the term "study skills"? In encouraging them to be developed in students, do we run the risk of taking students away from the serious business of living life? Apparently not, as the same skills needed for survival and success in life, are the ones to be mastered for studying well.

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Introduction

Study skills seem to be an abused term as immediately, they get associated with scoring high marks in examinations. The most important question that needs to be answered by the modern human individual is, "what do you do?" Every human needs to have an occupation, a vocation or a profession and the various allied skills associated with them. But aren't these professional skills as well as the day-to-day skills and habits all humans need to survive and lead a fulfilled existence, part and parcel of skills developed in childhood and educational experiences? Thus study skills and habits might have a much wider connotation, than just meant for 'study', but for the living of life itself.

Thus, students should always be conscious that developing good study habits and skills creates better citizens, professionals and humans out of them, even if their impact is not always felt tangibly on academic performance and test scores. Whatever general and specific study habits and skills we are talking about, there is a positive vibe through them in all areas of our lives, not just examination marks. Thus schools, teachers as well as parents should gear educational experiences towards deliberate development of these habits and skills, thereby making students better geared up to facing the various challenges of life.

Study skills vs. Life skills

So let us discuss how study skills get invariably enmeshed with life skills at all ages and in all cultures. The various categories of essential study skills can be listed as follows:

1. Creating the right environment for study: students learn to bring tranquility and discipline into their work sphere as a matter of principle. They understand the importance of focus and keeping distractions at bay.

2. Organizing the material and space for study: organisation is key to every kind of success, either in the personal circles or professional life. This is one attitude all

humans need to develop at the earliest, and their study skills and habits are the best way to start. Disorganised people mostly underperform, despite intelligence and opportunities.

3. Time management day to day as well as long term: the importance of time management in our lives cannot be stressed enough, it is the mother lode to everything good that we can make happen and again the best way to begin is managing our study hours and schedules during our student lives.

4. Maintaining records of study and written work and also future planning: relying on memory actually creates a lot of problems for students as well as adults. Keeping tangible well-organised records and documentation goes a long way in making life easier in all walks, particularly in our professional lives and the process of developing this skill begins while studying.

5. Organizing learning according to priority: prioritization is another skill which has to become a way of life, for us to live it well. Particularly in today's day and age, there is too much to know and too much to do, and too little time. Thus arranging tasks according to importance and allotting time to them accordingly is not just desirable, but an absolute necessity. This skill has to be learnt early in life and education has to be play a major role in making students learn it.

6. Using Information technology to store, classify and augment information: information technology has become a part and parcel of our lives now, traversing all areas of our lives and also, breaking down geographical and cultural barriers in education, training, logistics and achievement. Educational systems all over the world are gearing students from a very young age to be able to use information technology effectively for various functions in their studies, and they have to further keep doing so, as this particular skill is now essential for survival in the modern world.

7. Using desired outcomes to plan learning: for optimum utilisation of resources in personal as well as professional spheres, it is best to devise means according to what ends we are trying to achieve. Students using this strategy to plan their studies always score and achieve better. This too, is a skill needed to be developed from a very young age, so that it becomes a habit for life.

8. Emphasizing on active learning strategies: this is probably, the most critical skill for students, learners as well as professionals. It incorporates all the various components of the study skills spectrum into one harmonious whole. Learning as a passive entity is superficial at best, almost never long-term. The more we are involved in the learning process (in education, profession or day-to-day existence), be it organising information, finding reference material, brainstorming, investigating and solving problems, the more permanent our learning is going to be, thus resulting in better scores as well as better application.

It is important to point out here that all students, particularly at the higher secondary level have to develop this umbrella of study habits and study skills according to their learning styles and personality. Each individual human being is unique, so they create their combination of skills that work best for them.

Personal Learning Styles

It is important for students to identify their personal learning style and plan their study schedules and habits accordingly and using the right combination of styles as well. We can classify learning styles into the following categories:

1. The Divers: these students

- Don't waste time worrying or detailed planning
- Start tasks early and don't consider alternatives
- Work well with short bursts of activity
- Get to the next work quickly

So speed is the dominating skill here.

2. The Dreamers: these students

- Think a lot about the subject
- Don't focus on time schedules
- Research and evaluate one thing at a time thoroughly
- Don't concentrate on prioritization

So, detailing is the dominating skill here.

3. The Logicians: these students

- Look for sense and reason in the subject matter
- Are very organised in their approach to study
- Tackle complex problems step-by-step
- Are perfectionists

Thus, these students focus more on accuracy.

4. The Searchlight: these students

- Find everything motivating and interesting
- Have broad general knowledge
- Have bits of knowledge on lots of things but cannot remember details
- Have problems selecting what is relevant

These students are essentially extensive learners and generalists.

Conclusion

Thus, though the general corpus of study skills remain the same, there are subtle differences regarding the learning styles and modes, which in turn impact habits. Designing fluid structures regarding development of good study habits and skills in all students, taking into account individual differences of personality, intellect and interest, is thus, the best possible option for educationists. This way, all general and specific needs of the students of all age groups for all future goals will be well addressed.

References

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