

# CORRECT STUDY HABITS AS A PANACEA FOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

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## **Abstract**

There seems to be a sustained public outcry over students' poor performance in public examinations. The public worries are caused by high rate of academic failures among Nigerian students in such national examinations as the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), the National Examination Council (NECO), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The big question remains: what are the factors responsible for downward trend in the performance of Nigerian students in public examinations? A cursory attempt at the answers may include but not limited to inadequate qualified teachers, inadequate learning materials, unsuitable learning environment, indiscipline, and poor socio-economic background among others. A factor that is often not considered as crucial in the poor academic performance of students is the students' study habits. The present study explored the components of good study habits such as setting goals, controlling procrastination, evaluating information sources, preparing to study, managing time, flexible reading, improving concentration, reading fluency, using reference sources, using KWL Chart and study motivation. The study went further to recommend among others the formation of good study habits like setting specific goals for study times, planning specific times for studying, starting studying as planned, working on difficult assignment first, trying not to do too much work at the same time, and so on.

The desire for high level of academic performance among secondary school students has put a lot of pressure on students, teachers,

counselors, psychologists and the educational system itself. This situation may explain why Thomas (2007) insisted that, much effort has been made by educationists and psychologists to find various strategies to unraveling the complex determinant of academic performance, such as intelligence, study habit and other personality variables like self-concept, anxiety and motivation, and also suggested that learning achievement depends on the attitude, motivation and study habit of learners.

Ugodulunwa (2007) observed that the causes of low academic performance are diverse and cannot be associated with a single major factor alone. Isangedighi (1999) observed among other causes, that students' negative self-concept have often resulted in students' inconsistent/poor academic performance. Indeed, proponents of self-concept opined that self-concept and its variables may be paramount factors in academic failure. These assertions indicate that a successful achievement in any form of academic activity is based upon study, interpretation and application.

Students who graduate from the school with good grades must have engaged in effective study techniques. This is congruent with Fagbemi (2001), stated that learning outcomes depends on the amount of time the child is actively engaged in learning. The time spend on studying helps students to retain the materials learnt which will eventually boost the students' performance outcome during tests or examinations

The secondary level of education is the bridge between foundational primary level and the tertiary level. If this 'bridge' is allowed to break neither the foundation nor the super structure becomes useful. For the level to be worth its name and play its role, a lot has to be done in the area of ways and means by which the students learn and other instructional measures used to enable learning take place. Study habits of the learners are very central to their academic success. This may explain why Tulio (2008) concluded that a reduction in test-anxiety is no guarantee of subsequent improvement in academic performance when the level of study habits competence is ignored.

Good study habits will assist the learner to perform well while bad study habits stop same from performing well in instructional assessments. Groho (2012) had these tips for students' effective study habits.

Where you study is important, -while studying ensure that everything you need is with you. Outline and rewrite your note. Use memory game. Practice by yourself or with friend. Make a schedule that you can stick to. Take a break. Keep healthy and balanced, know what the expectations are for the class. Don't forget to learn.

As in any other habit, study habits can be formed, and when formed it becomes difficult to drop. Learners' poor academic performance from primary to tertiary level has been attributed to a lot of persons – teachers, parents, curriculum planners, government officials and so on but much of the blame has to do with the students themselves. The student has a lot to give to realize his academic dreams by disciplining him/her self, devoting enough time to reading, being regular to classes, and carrying out assignments given in the class and for homework. A good student should value time and make effective use of time.

It is surprising to know that youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was 46.5% in 2011 barely 3 years away from the target for achieving the Millennium Development goals in the reduction of poverty and hunger (Toure, 2012). Poor academic performance would only worsen the already bad employment situation if left unattended to.

Academic performance of students depends on a lot of factors. It is common to see that many students who perform well in their tests and examinations study very hard, devoting most of their time to their studies. However, some students do not appear to study so hard but perform excellently in their academic work. Other students do not obtain the level of academic success they honestly think are commensurate with the amount of efforts they made their study while many perform so poorly that their chances of moving to the next class or graduating from school seem bleak.

The question one is often forced to ask is; how can one account for these wide difference in academic performance in schools? Is this dispersed level in performance attributed to individual differences in mental abilities, dedicated effective study habits or environmental factors?

Study habit seems to be one denominator in the determination of academic performance. Since it is a factor which a student can control, this study will be focused on the relationship between study habits like note-taking, concentration, reading and time budgeting and academic performance of students.

The findings of this work will go a long way in contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the influence of study habits like use of time, concentration and other reading skills on academic performance of students, which will help the teachers in understanding, better the diversity

of learning of their students. As such, it is hoped that they could develop more effective methods in teaching their subject matter with a view to bringing in those that will appeal to the students study styles. The study will help the schools counselors in knowing how well to counsel the students for homework or home study and so, improve their academic performance.

This paper sets out to examine some vital study habits which help students perform well in tests and examinations. The paper focused on such study skills as goal setting, study times, good listening, controlling procrastination, improving concentration, evaluating, informing, use of reference sources, improving reading fluency, motivating self to study, having good study place, and the use of abbreviations, acronymic, sentences and flash cards.

### **Studying**

Studying is the process of examining something with an intent to understand. In this context, study involves reading. Reading according Well (1995) is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order constructs to derive meaning. It involves the process of language acquisition for communication and sharing information and ideas with the complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experience, attitude and language which is culturally and socially situated. Reading is an indispensable act of any literate person. It is common sense that which a capable literate student fails to read, such student becomes like an illiterate student who cannot read at all. Academic performance correlates with effective study (reading). It is more likely that voracious readers tend to gather and retain more information for academic performance and for future use than their idle counterparts.

In the same way, it is also likely that those who have better study skills would retain

more information for academic performance and for future use than those who have less skill. Stanovid (2004) found out in a study that students who engage in free reading did as well or better in tests of reading comprehension than students who were given direct instruction in reading.

Students who develop effective reading skills build their knowledge background. Effective reading skills provide initiation for more reading which in turn, provides for knowledge of text content, familiarity with text structures, development of reading fluency and linguistic competence (Goldstein and Feitelson, 2008).

### **Components of Good study Habits**

Good study habits are formed over a time and it is advisable that students get used to those things that lead to the development and sustenance of good study habits. Mangrum and Strichart (2012) wrote extensively on learning resources in which certain study skill categories were highlighted. The study skills that remain indispensable to the students include among others: setting goals, controlling procrastination, evaluating information sources, preparing to study, managing time flexible reading, improving concentration, reading fluency, using reference, sources, using KWL Chart and study motivation. It is hoped that students who adopt these skills would no doubt be able to study, understand, remember and perform well in tests and examinations.

### **Set Goals**

A goal is something one wants to achieve in due course of time. Goals are set on short-term or long term bases. Goals are better set in clear and specific forms so that your effort would have focus. Always remember to map out an amount of work desired to be accomplished in a given measurable time like an hour, three hours, a day, a week or even a semester. This enables one to

focus your attention to the work in hand and work towards its completion.

Good study goals are set within one's skills and abilities with proper knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses bearing in mind the time of accomplishment. Also, realistic and measurable goals should be set so that progress could be monitored. Let such goals be within control. Be able to control what to do so as to accomplish the goals set.

### **Use Reference Sources**

In course of one's studies, one needs to use reference sources to get information, facts and to answer questions. There are five types of reference sources which include Dictionary for the meaning, pronunciation and spelling of words. Another one is Thesaurus which contains synonyms for commonly used words which shows the same or nearly the same meaning with the words in use. Encyclopedia is a reference source containing articles on a variety of subjects while Almanac is another source that comes annually and in a single-volume. It deals with useful facts on a variety of topics. It usually contains current information because it is updated yearly. Abstracts and Catalogues are important and major types of reference materials. Books of abstracts are essential reference sources as well as catalogues. In catalogues could be found both subject and author references which a helpful means of locating information. Finally there is the Atlas which is a collection of maps on political and physical features of countries; on weather, oceans, and so on.

### **Study Time Management**

It has to be realized that time is fixed in hours, days, weeks, months and in years. It is therefore necessary to decide how best to use this time that no one can neither add to nor reduce. To make adequate use of time, one should prepare a term or semester calendar involving school activities and out-of-school activities.

After that, record the weekly schedule noting them day by day. Finally prepare a daily organizer which indicates the "to do" list. Each day's organizer is prepared a day before so as to move forward the unfinished day's activity to the next day and as much as possible, keep to the schedules of activities.

### **Motivate Yourself to Study**

This is done by rewarding oneself after study such as eating snacks, taking ice cream, taking a bottle of soft drink, etc. Also, study with friends and share little fun that does not distract. Such fun should not be long or unnecessary. Focus on the long term goal and develop interest in what to study. Take some breaks to rejuvenate and endure a comfortable environment and use motivational posters that remind the learner of his/her set goals and that ginger him/her to strive to achieve.

### **Get a Good Study Place**

The study place should be such that is available whenever needed, free from interruptions, free from distractions. The place should be such that contains all the study materials that are needed; have enough space for desk/seat or table and have comfortable chair. The place should be properly lighted and fully ventilated to ensure that it is comfortable for study.

### **Become a Flexible Reader**

A flexible reader selects the style of reading according to the purpose of the reading. A difficult material that needs to be understood is read slowly and this is called study reading while skimming style is used when the purpose of reading is to obtain a general idea about the material being read. Finally, scanning is a reading style used to locate a specific piece of information within the reading material. Knowing the purpose of reading a particular material enables one to apply a style of reading and so makes him/her a flexible reader.

### **Belong to Study Groups**

The learner should try to belong to a responsible study group because the group can pick him up should motivation to study be slipping off the member that is a source of motivation. If the group depends on a person to present or participate, it serves as impetus for the person to be more committed to study. One can learn valuable new study habits from the other group members. Teaching, explaining information and concepts to the other group members will help the learner reinforce himself/herself mastery of the information and concepts. A comparison of a learner's notes with those of the other members of the group will help clarify the notes and fill in any gaps.

### **Improving Concentration**

It is difficult for some students to concentrate while studying. Concentration while studying is important for good performance in class tests and examinations. In order to ensure maximum concentration, the studies must be done in a quiet, interruption-free and distraction free place. Make a schedule of accomplishable tasks. Study at the time of day the learner works best. The learner should ensure that he/she is neither tired nor hungry when studying; do one task at a time; relax when studying and stop being worried or tensed up. Develop an interest in the present study while taking breaks whenever there is a feeling of fatigue. To study without concentration is to try to fill an empty basket with water. This is simply impossible. It is a mere waste of time and remember that time is of essence in anything you are doing.

### **Controlling Procrastination**

To procrastinate is to post pone or put off or avoiding undertaking a task that one must surely undertake whereas to excessively procrastinate is to call for anxiety, bring about poor performance and or eventual failure. To control procrastination the learner should reward self at the completion of each task, prioritize the

tasks, avoid trying to finish everything at once, set specific goals and track the progress being made, work with a study group, study in a comfortable environment, work for short periods of time, create a "to do" list, tackle by force the particular dreaded tasks, start doing it not thinking about how to do it or how to finish it even before you begin, focus on starting a task not on finishing it, identify the ways in which procrastinations come and eliminate them.

### **Good Listening in Class**

It is important to be a good listener as much of what is presented would be verbally done. A good listener, it is said, is a good contributor. Listening implies paying attention, thinking about and mentally processing the things heard. It is a cognitive issue. To be a good listener one must be cognitively ready, emotionally present so as to find the topic useful and interesting. Be attentive to what is being said directing the mind on that alone. Also good listening requires active involvement that can predict the teacher's next speech or action while meeting up challenges as a result of difficulties in presentations being made. Finally come out triumphant over the environment which may be noisy, too hot or too cold, too bright or too dark. These adverse situations should not deter the listener from focusing on what is being taught. Listen as if that would be the last time of hearing such that is being presented. In other words, listen with rapped attention.

### **Improve Reading Fluency**

A student has a lot of information to read. In order to succeed within the limited available time, he/she needs to be efficient in reading and improve the reading fluency by undertaking one's heaviest reading work when at alert and not when tired. In addition, the student has to focus on what he/she is reading. Avoid distractions - physical or mental. Avoid reading word by word or pronouncing each word in head as reading goes on. Also increase the pace of

reading and do not strain the eyes with dull light. Avoid using highlighter so as not to pay excessive attention to particular page(s). Do not go back to read something except when absolutely necessary because there is the opportunity to go back later to review materials. Always focus on the key words in the sentences. Fluency is all about reading more information at less time.

### **Use of Abbreviations**

The use of abbreviations to write notes quicken students note writing and so makes the notes complete and accurate. Abbreviations may come in form of dept for department, edu for education, pls for please, u for you, etc. They aid fast writing but the writer should be able to write what he/she can read. In most cases only the student can read and understand his/her abbreviated note.

### **Use of Acronymic Sentences and Acronyms to Remember**

This is good to remember information in a given order. An acronym sentence is created using first letter of each piece of information to be remembered.

Forming an acronym is a nice strategy for remembering information in any order. As already noted, an acronym is a word formed from the first letter of each fact to be remembered. The acronym can be a real meaningful word or any nonsense word that can be pronounced.

### **The DETER Strategy for Taking Tests**

There are some factors that contribute to doing well in tests such as good information on what is being tested. On the other hand one has to show what one knows by knowing a strategy for taking the tests. The strategy in the DETER as presented by Mangrum and Strichart (2012) and in which each letter is a reminder of what to do is as follows:

**D = Directions or what can be called instructions.** Read the test direction very well and ensure proper understanding of what is required. Ask for clarifications if need be because the success and failure begins here. An example of a test direction may make a particular number compulsory; ask for limiting the answers to certain numbers of questions or to certain number of points/pages. Inability to obey the direction/instruction means an ability to fail the test.

**E = Examine:** Here you examine the entire test by reading through the questions. See how much work that is required to do and break them into manageable parts.

**T = Time:** Decide how much time each item will cost. Determine which items carry more points and spend more time on those ones. Distribute the available time wisely on all the items to avoid lacking time when the candidate knows what to write, and to avoid having plenty of time left when one had not done justice to questions knows.

**E = Easies:** This second E in DETER calls on examinee to first answer the questions seem to be easiest. Avoid spending all the time in difficult questions that happen to come first in the test while having no time left to answer the ones which answers are known but which come behind.

**R = Review:** A careful plan of time would afford the candidate the time to review answers and make them as complete and accurate as he/she wants them to be. In addition to the answers go back to the test directions or instructions to be certain the requirements were met. The DETER strategy is good in helping students do better in tests and examinations.

**Use of KWL Chart**

The KWL Chart is designed as an instructional reading strategy that teachers could use to guide students' textbook reading. One can however, use KWL to help oneself learn about a topic. Below is an illustration of a KWL Chart:

K	W	L

*Adapted from Mangrum and Strichart*  
<http://www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/en/kwl-chart.asp>.

The K stands for what one already know about the topic. One should complete the column with all that one knows about the new topic to be studied. W stands for what else one wants to know. This forms the new task, the new information or facts that the learner is searching for or undertaking. This is like the objective of the study. L stands for what one has learnt about the topic. Here the student writes down all that is learnt in the study. Each of these columns are filled at the end each stage.

**Remembering**

For some time the discussion had centred on reading or studying. It is very obvious that information read without remembering posses the same danger of not reading it at all. This places remembering at a high premium on the pedestrian of studying to remember (recall) for use at an appropriate time. Managrum and Strichart (2012) saw remembering as a tricky business. There are things learners would wish to remember but which are sometimes forgotten. On the other hand certain useless things learners rather would wish to forget keep coming up the memory lane. Remembering is the ability of the individual to recall, recite or retrieve an experience stored in the memory when needed (Anibueze, Ugbor and Anibueze, 2008). It is the

present knowledge of past experience (Loner and Malpass, 1991). Even though there is no "Magic pill" for remembering but Mangrum and Strichart (2012) gave some tips that can enhance remembering namely:

- i. Try to understand the information that must be remembered so as to relate it to what already known.
- ii. Try to form an association between the information that must remembered and a person, place, object situation, or emotion.
- iii. Frequently recite the information that must be remembered or write it several times.
- iv. Break the large information into smaller, more manageable categories. Work on remembering information on each category separately.
- v. Create a graphic organizer for information that must be remembered.
- vi. Bring a personal touch to the information that must be remembered. In other words allow it to relate to your life, property, interest, aspiration, etc.
- vii. Form a picture of the information you to remember in the mind. Visual imagery is a powerful tool for remembering.
- viii. Apply what to remember in speaking and writing so as to get used to them.
- ix. Test self by asking self question on what must be remembered and cross check the information based on the answers.
- x. Try to make remembering a fun activity by creating games using the information that must be remembered.

**Conclusion**

Study habits are central to students' acquisition and utilization of information and the

consequent performance in their academics. There is need therefore for students and learners to get acquainted with the various ways and means of acquiring good skills for study. Students with good study habits are very likely to perform well in their academic pursuit than those whose study habits are not so good. Remembering is not just a class exercise but something one should do as an aspect of one's life (Managrum and Strichart, (2012). It is therefore, very necessary for students to study under well established habits, and to be able to remember or recall what they have learnt for use in tests and examinations. In addition to passing tests and examinations, the information gathered and recalled are applied in daily lives of the users.

### **Recommendations**

Habits are formed and once formed they become part of you. As already noted most successful students have good study habits. It is evident that students can work to develop study habits that they do not possess ab initio. The following are recommended for formation of good study habits:

1. Try to set specific goals for your study times.
2. Plan specific times for studying.
3. Start studying as planned
4. Try to study at the same times each day
5. Try not do too much studying at one time
6. Work on the assignment you find most difficult first.
7. Review your notes before beginning an assignment.
8. Tell your friends not to call you during your study times
9. Call another student when you have difficulty with an assignment.

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