

The Classroom Situation: Improving Study Habits of Secondary School Students in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

In this experiential observation and desktop based paper we argue the case for coming up with a formal study programme for students at secondary school in Zimbabwe. Our experience with students at both secondary school level and tertiary level has taught us that effective study strategies are the gateway to school success, graduation, college entry, and job advancement. Our experiences as teachers at secondary school level has shown us that poor study habits can bar even bright students from many important opportunities that would otherwise enable them to realise their potential. We established that the problem most students have that contributes to their poor performance in tests and examination is lack of proper study habit. For an excellent performance, there is need for the student to form good study habit. In school, high academic performance has been attributed to students' effective study habits. This is the reason why teachers try to adopt many techniques to help students to learn. In this paper we thus argue that the pillar to improvement of secondary school students' study habits is a well outlined and implemented study habit guidance programme.

Keywords: Study habit, guidance programme, secondary school, strategies.

1. Introduction

In this paper we look at the strategies one can use to improve study habits of secondary school students. We argue that the pillar to improvement of secondary school students' study habits is a well outlined and implemented study habit guidance programme. We start by giving you a definition of the term study habit before discussing the implementation of a study habits programme in a secondary school setting.

Orientation of the Problem

The world over, effective study strategies are the gateway to school success, graduation, college entry, and job advancement. Poor study habits can bar even bright students from many important opportunities that would otherwise enable them to realise their potential. As observed by Ogbodo (2010), the problem most students have that contributes to their poor performance in tests and examination is lack of proper study habit. For an excellent performance, there is need for the student to form good study habit. In school, high academic performance has been attributed to students' effective study habits (Ogbodo, 2010). This is the reason why teachers try to adopt many techniques to help students to learn.

Statement of Purpose

Our purpose in this paper is to give secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe (especially those responsible for students' guidance and counselling) guidelines that would assist them in instilling an effective study habit into their students.

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2. Methodology

This paper is based on our experiences as teachers at secondary school in Zimbabwe and literature review. In this paper, we therefore use both theoretical and empirical evidence in our discussion.

Defining Study Habit

A study habit can simply be seen as a mental effort to obtain knowledge. Studying is thus an art of learning which helps the individual not only to acquire knowledge but also the skill and the habit to study (Ogbodo, 2010). Narramore (1974) quoted in Ogbodo (2010) defines habit as “a pattern of activity which, through repetition, has been learned to the point that it has become automatic and can be carried on with a minimum of conscious effect”. As such, effective study habit becomes a situation in which a learner studies regularly to achieve maximum success in his/her school work. Study habit, therefore, refers to learning which leads to the achievement of a learner’s goal, through a prescribed pattern of steady behaviour (Ogbodo, 2010).

The Need for a School Study Habit Guidance Programme

In our experiences as teachers at secondary school level in Zimbabwe we established that studying presents problems to students in various forms. Most students have the eagerness to study but may not know the strategies to study effectively. This implies that students need guidance in their studying efforts. Guidance refers to leading a person to self-actualisation or helping him to develop his full potential. This objective of self-actualisation is difficult to be attained if a student is unaware of or unrealistic about his potential (Abid, 2006). Bhatnagar and Gupta (1999) define guidance as a process of helping the individual find solutions to his own problems and accept them as his own. They further say that guidance is an integral part of education; a continuous service; both generalised and specialised service, for the whole child and is not confined only to some specific aspects of his personality. Thus students benefit a lot if an effective study programme is organised in the school.

A planned programme of study is thus a good strategy to motivate students to explore, ask questions and solve problems that confront them. Ogbodo (2010) believes that providing a study programme is an important strategy for school management. She argues that the programme helps a student to make intelligent choice and adjustment. A good plan for studies is necessary and students should learn to use their time profitably for the benefit of the school and themselves. This tallies well with the writers’ experiences as teachers at secondary school level in Zimbabwe. One of the writers was responsible for students’ guidance and counselling as well as district resource teacher (for almost 150 primary and secondary schools), whilst the other one was a cluster resource teacher-responsible for mobilising resources for the students in the cluster of 10 schools (3 secondary and 5 primary schools).

Guidance programmes for secondary school students are designed to address the physical, emotional, social and academic difficulties of adolescence (Abid, 2006). By resolving physical, emotional, social and academic difficulties of the students and by helping students understand their learning strengths and weaknesses, their study habits can be improved. Better study habits and study skills lead to better achievement scores. The guidance programmes promote academic, educational, personal, social and career development (Abid, 2006). Guidance programmes foster positive attitude towards school learning and work and hence, improve academic achievement (Ibid). A study was conducted by Hudesman, *et al.*, (1986) to compare the impact of structured and non-directive counseling styles on academic performance of high-risk students. Results indicated that students in structured counseling condition had higher GPAs than those in non-directive counseling condition at the end of semester. Francis and others (1987) also examined the positive effects of counseling on students’ communication patterns, study habits and academic achievement. They concluded that the secondary school guidance programme should be a part of the total school programme and complement learning in the classroom. It should be child centred, preventive and developmental. The guidance programme should aim at maximizing the student’s potential by encouraging their social, emotional and personal growth at each stage of their development.

Kochhar (2000) considers guidance necessary to help the pupil with specific problems like lack of relationship between ability and achievement, deficiency in one or several school subjects, faulty study habits, and defective methods of learning and poor motivation. Bhatnagar and Gupta (1999) are of the opinion that for better student achievement, it is necessary to aid pupils make progress in their education by removing their difficulties and developing good study skills. Hence guidance programmes must include this aspect of student aid. Guidance plays a vital role in removing the educational, personal, social, mental, emotional and other similar problems of the students.

Thus a study habits guidance programme is the first step and strategy in improving secondary school students study habits. Having said this it becomes mandatory to look at the components of such a programme. But before going to those components it is necessary to look at a typology of study habits

3. A Typology of Study Habits

According to Ogbodo (2010) study habits can be grouped into hobbiial, recreational, concentration and deviational study habits. The first three produce positive effects while the fourth has a negative effect.

Hobbial study habits treat studying as a hobby. A hobby is an activity one does because he/she derives some joy and satisfaction in doing it. After formal education attainment, some people like reading as their hobby. The practice of reading as a hobby makes one to be versatile in knowledge in many areas and the person can discuss knowledgeably with others. This type of reading is a positive one to learning not only in developing mental reasoning but also in helping the person to satisfy his interests and aspirations. Thorne (2006) states that the memory demands for school-age children are much greater than they are for adults because adults have already acquired much of the knowledge and skills needed to function every day. As the knowledge base for some fields like technology changes from time to time, the new information is generally highly specific and builds on existing knowledge. School children are constantly bombarded with new knowledge in multiple topic areas in which they may or may not be interested. This entails that as students develop a study hobby, s/he is always rehearsing on the material read hence the information is kept in the long term memory and becomes permanent (Gifford, 2008).

Reading for recreation or relaxation is very common among the education elite. Students should be encouraged to read magazines instead of reading text books all the time. Students, who read magazines at intervals learn to relax, cool their brain and avoid mental fatigue. This type of studying produces positive results as it keeps the student's interests in reading helps them to acquire more knowledge and makes for a disciplined life in the school.

The concentration reading is the most important one that provides the desired outcome. It is the bedrock and the result oriented reading which makes for achievement. Researches by eminent scholars of language arts have come up with several formulae for effecting positive results in a learning situation. Some of these include the SQ3R and the ROSEMARY (L) method (Ogbodo, 2002) recommended for use in school by counsellors.

In the SQ3R technique S stands for survey, which means having a bird's eye view of the contents, chapters, going through the headline and sub-headings to the end in order to have a general impression of the written material; Q stands for question and thus reader formulates question on the broad ideas he has grasped from the general, survey in anticipation of likely author's answers; first R means read the passage carefully to pick out answers to the questions which were formulated; second R means recite to oneself or to a friend or write down all the salient points shifted from the passage; and third R means review or revise.

In the ROSEMARY (L) R stands for repetition, reading the material over and over again (elaborative rehearsal- Bjork, 2001) to make it completely familiar and get used to the words inside the material or topic(s) treated; O stands for over-learning, reading and re-reading again and again will produce over-learning of the material to the extent that if you have to forget any part, that part will be minimal; S stands for summarisation; E stands for enumeration of the major points in a linear manner; M stands for mnemonics for important ideas, principles, concepts, formulae etc. to help your immediate recall and reutilization of such

ideas, formula etc.; A stands for application of the material learnt to your personal life; R stands for revision of all you have done up to this stage; and Y stands for yes I know it now and I can apply it to any situation of my life to impact my world. You can now use the (L). L means linkage. You link the materials read to practical daily living to enable you internalise the facts. Thus, relating the new information to already gained experience (Bjork, 2001).

In deviational reading the reader deviates from the actual reading and pretends to be reading. If this habit is not curbed in students, it may lead to loss of interest in the acquisition of knowledge. Studying or reading textual materials by this method takes the form of browsing. Result of this type of reading is a negative one because the person deviates from the norms and rules of actually studying (Ogbodo, 2010).

4. The Study Habit Programme

According to Mapfumo (2001), the study habit programme should enlist the assistance of all teachers; make available how to study materials; present a general study skills programme before subject-specific techniques; and introduce subject-specific how to study units in the school curriculum. He further argues that the assistance of other specialists such as psychologists, special needs education experts and remedial teachers should be enlisted, especially when dealing with such groups as pupils with learning difficulties; under-achievers; gifted learners; and pupils of average and above average ability who for some reason have specific learning problems. Our experiences as has shown us that not only should we enlist the assistance of these specialist service teachers, but all classroom teachers for they are the ones who have close contact with the pupils concerned. The study habit programme should be owned by everyone at the secondary school. This explains the need for involving all school members and a holistic approach to its formulation. This also means the involvement of parents in the programme so that they inculcate study habits in their children. Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) indicated that the environment in which a child lives is a critical factor influencing his/her study habits and ultimately contributes to the progress of the child in school.

The programme should also give guidelines for individual student private time table. According to Ogbodo (2010) the daily study could be divided into three periods per day. She thinks that subjects should be arranged in terms of relative importance. If one's ability to study and concentrate effectively lasts one hour or less, the time has to be plotted within these time ranges. Those in the boarding house must have to be guided by the school schedule. One day must be left open as a free day from studying. Rest periods must be included at their appropriate spaces. Time for social activities, physical education and evening time for watching the television has to be indicated as a controller and regulator of each student's behaviour towards achieving the set goal. The time table has to be reviewed and adjusted at the end of each term. In fact this study time table has to be guided by the typology of study habits outlined above.

5. The School Counsellor's Role

According to Ogbodo (2010), for the purpose of creating a conducive and healthy atmosphere in the school, the counsellor's work can be divided into two broad headings: general and specific areas. The counsellor's general role is in the area of planning, co-coordinating and referral. He/she, in consultation with the school headmaster, plans for the orientation programme for new students, open seminar for various classes, follow-up visits and referrals.

Specific roles involve the counsellor as a teacher, an enabler and an advocate. For Ogbodo (2010) an enabler is one whose activities are directed towards assisting the client to find the coping strength and resources within him for the changes necessary for accomplishing the set objectives. On the other hand, an advocate is one who acts as a spokesman for the client by presenting and arguing the client's course when it is necessary, to accomplish the set objective (Compton and Gallaway, 1975 in Ogbodo, 2002).

The above statements imply that the counsellor has to help students to assess their reading ability, aptitude and help them through planning to develop effective study habits. Consultancy should be client-

centred. The counsellor should speak to other teacher son behalf of the students where the need arises. He should also help the students to find some motivating factors that will spur them to real achievement.

It is also indicated by Rutondoki (2000:63) that “Effective guidance and counselling services in schools cultivate in the students good attitudes and behaviour leading to fruitful life. A student who loses confidence in his or her ability and who devalues himself or herself lacks concentration and this leads to continuous academic failure”. This means the counsellor has the role to inculcate the attributes mentioned by Rutondoki (2000) so as to assist the school study habit programme’s success.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we thus conclude that for effective performance, no child should go through secondary school education without having received guidance and counselling because this tends to lead students to develop unrealistic ambitions that result in them becoming discontented members of the society. In this paper we argued that comprehensive developmental school counselling programmes positively impact students, parents, teachers, administrators, boards of education, other student services personnel, school counsellors, business, and industry. The formation of effective study habit in secondary school is an outcome of a good guidance and counselling programme. Students who are well guided and counselled are result oriented, thus participating in all tests and examinations. The formation of effective study habit will create the awareness for regular and steady learning.

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