

ASSESSMENT OF STUDY HABITS AMONG YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

EVALUACIÓN DE LOS HÁBITOS DE ESTUDIO ENTRE LOS ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS JÓVENES

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61273/neyart.v4i1.204>

| Received: 18/02/2026 | Accepted: 22/04/2026 | Published: 24/05/2026

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Abstract-- This article evaluates the study habits of 44 first-semester engineering students using Ortega's (2012) Study Habits Questionnaire. The quantitative study, grounded in a post-positivist paradigm, examines three dimensions: study methods, task completion, and exam preparation. Results show an overall mean of 1.82, classified as a medium-low level. The weakest dimension was exam preparation ($M=1.79$), with 45.5% of students never finishing topics before an assessment. Female students scored slightly higher than males, though without statistically significant differences. The study concludes that students tend to prioritize formal task completion over deep cognitive strategies, and recommends implementing psychopedagogical programs focused on time management, reading comprehension, and self-regulated learning.

Keywords-- academic performance, higher education, study habits, self-regulated learning, university students.

Abstract-- Este artículo presenta una evaluación de los hábitos de estudio de 44 estudiantes de Ingeniería del primer semestre mediante el Cuestionario de Hábitos de Estudio de Ortega (2012). El estudio emplea un análisis cuantitativo, un paradigma postpositivista, y se divide en tres dimensiones: los métodos empleados para estudiar para el examen o la finalización de la tarea. Esto arrojó una media agregada igual a 1.82, correspondiente a la categoría de nivel medio-bajo. La dimensión más débil fue la preparación para el examen ($M=1.79$), que representó el 45.5% de los estudiantes que nunca cubren los temas antes de una evaluación. Las mujeres lograron medias ligeramente más altas que los hombres, pero sin diferencias significativas. Nuestra conclusión es que los estudiantes parecen prestar más atención al cumplimiento formal que al afrontamiento con estrategias cognitivas profundas, y se ha propuesto incorporar programas psicoeducativos al plan de estudios actual con el fin de fortalecer la planificación del tiempo, la lectura comprensiva y la autorregulación del aprendizaje.

Keywords-- hábitos de estudio, rendimiento académico, educación superior, autorregulación del aprendizaje, estudiantes universitarios.

INTRODUCTION

International Background

Study habits have been recognized as one of the most relevant predictors of academic performance in higher education worldwide. International research has consistently documented that the way university students organize, plan, and execute their study routines directly impacts their academic results, their retention in the educational system, and their professional development. A classic reference is meta-analysis by Credé and Kuncel (2008) utilizing data from 72,431 college students in $N = 344$ independent studies. Their research showed that inventories of study habits, skills and attitudes represent the academic success factor sometimes referred to as the "third pillar" of college admissions, in that this area has predictive power equal to standardized admission tests or high school grades. Specifically, motivation to study and study skills showed the highest relationships with GPA.

Based on Jafari, Aghaei and Khatony (2019), in a cross-sectional study the researchers studied 380 student of medical sciences from Kermanshah, Iran and found that most students hold a moderate-level study habits which was 81.3% while exhibiting a direct significant relationship to academic performance. This research illustrates the significance of assessing study habits prior to university entry as a predictor of student academic risk.

A study among a cohort of 614 undergraduate students at a large public university in the USA explored associations between performance (grade point average) with five health behaviours and ten daily habits (Reuter and Forster, 2021). Significant associations were found between sleep quality, daily breakfast and other healthy behaviors, and GPA. This study adds to the understanding of strategic behaviour: it introduces a biopsychosocial aspect into learning.

Biwer et al. (2024), The Role of Habits in the Self-Regulated Learning of First-Year College Students (Higher Education). Students often use shallow processing strategies, such as stark reviewing material and learning information a few days before an exam instead of deeper problem solving techniques like spaced repetition, even if they know the benefits of ultimately doing so. Not to mention what it does to create a habit inertia which is one of the main barriers to enhancing our achievement level.

Research in CBE–Life Sciences Education by Walck-Shannon, Rowell, and Frey (2021) evaluated the relationship between study practices and performance among students enrolled in a college biology course. The authors found that both the time students spent studying and how they scheduled and used

their study periods contribute to great performance on assessments. The main finding was that more active strategies — especially retrieval practice and spacing, access to their pre-enrichment skills — correlating with better grades regardless of academic preparation prior to enrichment.

Finally, Rodríguez et al. Based on data from 2010 to 2020, Abar et al. Their findings showed that different executive functions and self-regulation strategies in learning correlate highly with most aspects of student well-being, providing further support for the value of using study habits as a global measure of college student development.

Latin American Context

Study habits are a special topic of interest when assessing the preferences of university students, especially in the context of Latin America where high drop-out rates characterize the region. Many studies have reported that between 40 and 70% of university students in Latin America do not complete their degree programs, with deficiencies in study habits being one of the most commonly identified explanatory variables.

George-Reyes, Ruiz-Ramírez, Glasserman-Morales y Olarte-Arias (2023) comparó a estudiantes universitarios en México y otros en Colombia para conocer la forma de estudio que tuvieron frente a la transformación digital provocada por la COVID-19. Their results showed major transformations in academic habits focusing mainly on time management in virtual environments, self-learning, and digital technologies acting as mediators of study processes.

In Peru, the study by Trigos-Tapia, Espinoza-Alvarado, and Céspedes-Chauca (2022), published in the *Revista Herediana de Rehabilitación*, assessed study habits among Occupational Therapy students using validated instruments. Results revealed the heterogeneous levels in time management, study environment and academic planning dimensions highlight early diagnostic assessments during their period of university education.

A study by Salamea-Nieto and Cedillo-Chalaco (2021) in Ecuador's *INNOVA Research Journal* investigated the link between study habits and motivation to learn among college students. Their findings confirm that motivation relates more robustly with behaviors like completing the assigned work, paying attention during class, and managing time than other study habits; highlighting both affective and volitional constructs of student behaviors by Latin American university students.

In Colombia, Mondragón et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between study habits and academic performance among mechanical engineering students, finding significant correlations between the two variables. This study, published in the Colombian Journal of Advanced Technologies (RCTA), highlights the predictive value of study habits in exact sciences programs, where cognitive load and sustained practice are particularly decisive factors.

Relatives, on the literature review, Carrillo Vargas and Bravo Bastidas (2022) performed a systematic review of studies about pattern study and academic performance in Latin American college students. Their findings highlight that, although existing research in the region predominantly supports a link of good study behaviour with favourable academic achievement, there is a concerning deficiency of longitudinal studies and validated instruments for Latin American samples.

Chilca (2017) published a study with university students from Lima, Peru where she reported an association between study habits, self-esteem and academic performance ($R = 0.503$). The results, published in the journal *Propósitos y Representaciones* of the Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola also indicated that around 50% needed to change their study strategies due to inadequate ones, which emphasizes the need for intervention programs baseline on students habits of study at their admission to university.

Study Objective

The overall objective of this study is to evaluate study habits among college students, identifying the predominant patterns in their academic routines and their association with academic performance.

Rationale for the Study

The assessment of study habits among university students represents a line of educational research of high theoretical and practical relevance. From an academic perspective, study habits have been recognized as one of the most robust predictors of performance in higher education, according to evidence accumulated in the international and Latin American literature (Credé & Kuncel, 2008; Chilca, 2017). However, their systematic and contextualized study remains insufficient in many university systems across the region.

From a practical perspective, a deep understanding of how university students study enables higher education institutions to design psycho-pedagogical intervention strategies aimed at reducing failure rates and dropout rates. In Latin America, where university dropout rates range from 40% to 70% (Carrillo

Vargas & Bravo Bastidas, 2022), having precise diagnostic s on study habits at the start of the university journey can serve as a high-impact preventive tool.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerated transition to online and blended learning modalities have significantly transformed the conditions under which students carry out their studies (George-Reyes et al., 2023). This context calls for new assessments that update the diagnosis of study habits in the post-pandemic era and consider the implications of digital environments on self-regulated learning.

Finally, this study is justified from the perspective of educational equity. The literature indicates that deficits in study habits affect students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and academic origins in distinct ways (Reuter & Forster, 2021; Jafari et al., 2019). Identifying these patterns helps to highlight structural inequalities in access to quality higher education and to inform more inclusive institutional policies for academic support.

Study Limitations

Like all empirical research, this study acknowledges a number of limitations that must be considered when interpreting its results and extrapolating its conclusions:

Cross sectional design: Since it is a cross sectional study, causal relationship with study habits and the academic performance cannot be established. The data only captures a snapshot of the participants' academic journey and provides no basis for observation of longitudinal changes.

Self-reported: The assessment of study habits are self-perceived by students, exposing potential bias from social desirability. Participants might over report encouraged behaviours.

Sample representativeness: The sample used for this survey may not be representative of all university student profiles since it is limited to one or a few institutions, majors and academic years. This limits how pervasive the results are to other contexts.

Ecological validity: Academic performance data are collected from institutional records, and because grades reflect course-typical assessment factors for an instructor, they may also be poor proxies of the degree to which students are really learning.

Unmeasured confounding variables: Unmeasured factors that might shape both study behaviours and performance such as paid employment, living environment, access to computer technology or family responsibilities.

Study context (COVID effects): Between study habits during-COVID vs what would be the comparative studies in person via pre-COVID settings, it is not possible to disentangle.

DEVELOPMENT

Research Paradigm

This research falls within the **post-positivist** paradigm. This paradigm holds that, while an objective reality exists, it can only be apprehended imperfectly and probabilistically due to human limitations and the limitations of the phenomenon itself (Ramos, 2015). Furthermore, it is grounded in critical objectivity and the use of rigorous methods to test the proposed hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Research Approach

The study is conducted using a quantitative approach. According to Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), this approach allows for the collection of data to test hypotheses based on numerical measurement and statistical analysis, establishing patterns of behavior in a population. For their part, Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that quantitative design is ideal for examining the relationship between variables measured by standardized instruments.

Participants

Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used. The sample consisted of **44 college students**, with the following distribution by gender:

- **Men:** 25 (56.8%)
- **Women:** 19 (43.2%)

Instrument

The study uses a **Study Habits Questionnaire**, originally developed by **Ortega (2012)**. This instrument was designed to quantitatively assess the intellectual and behavioral routines that students apply in their learning process.

1. Structure and Dimensions

The questionnaire organizes the assessment into three key dimensions that encompass a set of specific indicators:

- **Study habits:** Assesses techniques such as underlining, using a dictionary for unfamiliar terms, reading comprehension, memorization, consistent review, and specific planning for assessments.

- **Task completion:** Focuses on the student's ability to summarize, respond with understanding, prioritize order and presentation, seek external support (peers, teachers, or family), and organize time and tasks according to their difficulty.
- **Exam preparation:** Measures advance time management, selection of relevant content, and effectiveness in completing the studied topics.

2. Grading System

The instrument uses a Likert-type rating scale with three frequency levels, which allows for categorizing the intensity of the habit in the student:

1. **Never** (1 point)
2. **Sometimes** (2 points)
3. **Always** (3 points)

3. Application and Scope

In this study, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of **44** first-semester engineering **students**. Its purpose was to establish the correlation between these habits and academic performance, which was measured in a complementary manner through grade reports and assessment records for the school year

Procedure

1. **Ethics and Recruitment Phase:** Informed consent was obtained from participants, guaranteeing anonymity and the strictly academic use of the data.
2. **Data Collection Phase:** A study habits inventory was administered in digital format. Simultaneously, academic averages were collected from institutional records (with prior authorization).
3. **Organization Phase:** The data were tabulated and cleaned to eliminate incomplete or atypical records.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software at two levels:

- **Descriptive Analysis:** Calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to characterize the sample and the dimensions of study habits.

- **Inferential Analysis:** Application of correlation tests (Pearson or Spearman) to determine the relationship between habits and performance. For comparisons by gender and field of study, tests of mean differences such as Student's t-test or ANOVA were used.

Data Analysis

Sample Description

The study habits questionnaire, based on the instrument by Ortega (2012), was administered to a total of 44 first-semester engineering students. The sample consisted of 25 men (56.8%) and 19 women (43.2%), constituting a representative group of students in the early stages of their university education.

Table 1. *Sample distribution by gender.*

Gender	n	%
Men	25	56.8%
Women	19	43.2%
Total	44	100%

Source: *Author's own calculations.*

Results by Dimension

The results are presented organized according to the three dimensions of the instrument: Study Methods, Task Completion, and Exam Preparation. The rating scale used is a three-point Likert scale: Never (1 point), Sometimes (2 points), and Always (3 points). For the interpretation of means, the following ranges are considered: values between 1.00 and 1.50 correspond to a Low level; between 1.51 and 2.25, Low-Medium; between 2.26 and 2.75, High-Medium; and between 2.76 and 3.00, High.

Dimension I: Study Habits

This dimension assesses the techniques students use during the process of reading and personal study, including underlining, using a dictionary, reading comprehension, memorization, review, and planning for assessments.

Table 2. *Study Habits Results.*

Indicator	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	Average
Underline as you read	15 (34%)	22 (50%)	7 (16%)	1.82
Use a dictionary for unfamiliar terms	20 (45%)	18 (41%)	6 (14%)	1.68
Active reading comprehension	12 (27%)	24 (55%)	8 (18%)	1.91
Content memorization	10 (23%)	25 (57%)	9 (20%)	1.98
Constant review of the material	18 (41%)	21 (48%)	5 (11%)	1.70
Specific planning for assessments	16 (36%)	20 (45%)	8 (18%)	1.82

Source: *Author's own work.*

On this dimension the overall mean is 1.82, which means that it is at a low-middle level. The indicator most supported by appropriate habits is to memorize the content (M; 1.98), where (56.8%) of students “sometimes” and only (20.5%) “always.” On the other hand, having a dictionary for unknown words (M=1.68) and constant reviewing of the knowledge (M=1.70) were shown to be lowest mean averages in this dimension which indicates that most students seldom arrange these strategies. Specifically, multiple-choice practice and essay prompt generation was used never by 34% to 45% of students, indicating a major gap in their initial study routines.

Dimension II: Task Completion

This dimension explores how students approach academic tasks, considering the creation of summaries, content comprehension, presentation of work, seeking support, and time management.

Table 3. *Task Completion Results.*

Indicator	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	Average
Prepares their own summaries	17 (39%)	20 (45%)	7 (16%)	1.77

Answers based on understanding, not from memory	13 (30%)	22 (50%)	9 (20%)	1.91
Pays attention to neatness and presentation of assignments	8 (18%)	26 (59%)	10 (23%)	2.05
Seeks outside support (peers/teachers)	14 (32%)	23 (52%)	7 (16%)	1.84
Organizes tasks by difficulty and time	19 (43%)	20 (45%)	5 (11%)	1.68

Source: *Author's own calculations.*

Dimension II is also in the low-to-middle range, with a mean of 1.85. Attention to order and presentation of assignments was the item with the most positive response (M=2.05) — 59.1% when asked “sometimes” and 22.7% “always.” At the other end of the scale is completing tasks ordered in terms attention and time available (M=1.68), with 43.2% of students reporting they never do this item. Also weakly indicates the writing of personal summaries (M=1.77), because students just copy information without adequate processing or synthesis.

Dimension III: Exam Preparation

This dimension measures the preparation strategies students implement in anticipation of assessments, covering advance time management, content selection, completion of topics, and review of notes.

Table 4. *Exam Preparation.*

Indicator	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	Average
Plans ahead	18 (41%)	20 (45%)	6 (14%)	1.73
Selects relevant content to study	14 (32%)	23 (52%)	7 (16%)	1.84
Finish the topics before the exam	20 (45%)	19 (43%)	5 (11%)	1.66
Review notes and materials before the exam	12 (27%)	24 (55%)	8 (18%)	1.91

Source: *Author's own analysis.*

Dimension III shows the lowest performance, with an overall average of 1.79, at the lower end of the low-to-medium range. The most critical indicator is completing the material before the exam (M=1.66), where 45.5% of students reported never achieving this. Advance time management (M=1.73) also showed notable deficiencies, with 40.9% of students never planning ahead. This picture reveals that most first-semester students improvise their exam preparation, lacking systematic strategies to ensure adequate coverage of the material.

Overall Results and Comparison by Gender

The following table consolidates the means obtained by dimension, disaggregated by gender, providing an overview of the group's study habits.

Table 5. *Overall Results and Comparison by Gender.*

Dimension	Men (n=25)	Women (n=19)	Overall (n=44)	Level
Study Modes	1.80	1.85	1.82	Low-intermediate
Task completion	1.83	1.88	1.85	Medium-low
Exam preparation	1.77	1.82	1.79	Low
OVERALL AVERAGE	1.80	1.85	1.82	Medium-low

Source: *Author's own calculations.*

Overall, the group's mean is 1.82, placing it in the lower-middle range of the instrument. Women have slightly higher means than men across all three dimensions, with an overall mean of 1.85 compared to 1.80, although this difference is not statistically significant and both groups fall within the same classification range. The dimension with the greatest relative strength is Task Resolution (M=1.85), followed by Study Methods (M=1.82), while Exam Preparation (M=1.79) is the area of greatest weakness for the group as a whole.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer a critical assessment of the academic routines of first-semester engineering students. The overall mean of 1.82, which places the group at a low-to-medium level, is consistent with the regional issue described by Carrillo Vargas and Bravo Bastidas (2022), who associate deficits in study habits with high dropout rates in Latin America (40% to 70%). This initial level suggests that students are undergoing a complex transition to higher education without the necessary tools to cope with the cognitive demands of their program.

One of the most relevant points is the gap between formal compliance and the depth of learning. While the highest-rated indicator was attention to the order and presentation of assignments ($M=2.05$), cognitive processing tasks, such as writing one's own summaries ($M=1.77$), were deficient. This phenomenon is consistent with the results of Biwer et al. (2024) that describe a "habit inertia," wherein students gravitate towards superficial processing strategies—even while recognizing they are not optimal: passive memorization, for example. In this study, for memorization, the means ($M=1.98$) obtained was prioritized among the highest scores, reinforcing what is called reactive learning and non-meaningful learning.

Dimension III (Exam Preparation) was the area of greatest weakness ($M=1.79$), highlighting that 45.5% of students never finish the material before an assessment. This lack of foresight aligns with the observations of Walck-Shannon, Rowell, and Frey (2021), who argue that time allocation is more critical than the total time invested. The improvisation observed in the sample suggests that students have not adopted spaced repetition practices, a technique that, according to the literature, is key to academic success regardless of prior preparation.

The low ability to organize tasks by difficulty and time ($M=1.68$) can be interpreted in light of the transformations documented by George-Reyes et al. (2023). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, self-management in virtual environments has become a greater challenge for college students. The results indicate that the group has not yet managed to autonomously regulate their study processes within the new digital ecosystem, which increases their academic risk.

Finally, although women showed slightly higher means (1.85 vs. 1.80), the homogeneity in the low-to-medium level of both genders underscores the need for a widespread intervention. As Chilca (2017) points out, approximately 50% of university students need to modify their study techniques upon entering college. The data from this study justify the design of psycho-pedagogical programs that not only teach

reading techniques but also strengthen self-regulation and motivation, elements that Credé and Kuncel (2008) refer to as the “third pillar” of academic success.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the Study Habits Questionnaire (Ortega, 2012) administered to 44 first-semester engineering students, the following conclusions emerge:

The general level of study habits for the group is low-to-moderate ($M = 1.82$), emphasizing that intervention strategies should be applied from the first months of the semester.

Dimension III (Exam preparation) is the most important area, where the mean was significantly low ($M=1.79$), indicating that students do not have systematic study before assessments.

Firstly for women, on all dimensions, the means are generally higher than that of men yet not statistically significant.

Most students show a willingness to formally complete assignments but lack deep cognitive strategies that promote meaningful learning.

It is recommended to design and implement a study habits development program that prioritizes the areas of time management, comprehensive reading techniques, and exam preparation strategies.

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Collaborative Work Table

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