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School Attachment and Implications of Study Skills in Diverse Educational Settings

Abstract

The variety of the languages used by lecturers as the instruction language at a university level, educational approaches, methodologies, and instructional devices cannot be separate from school settings, students` foreground and background diversities (region, origin, gender etc.) and most significantly students` study skills in overcoming with challenging problems and achieving success in terms of academic achievement. Apart from aforementioned factors, pluralism in post-secondary education is one of the challenges of the globalized world, nonetheless it can also be considered as an advantage in joining a wider network of communication throughout the world which can elevate students` perceptual understanding of the world they live in. In this study, together with scanted data obtained by other researchers it is aimed to rephrase the significance of ``study skills`` in handling challenges of today`s post-secondary education as in raising self-awareness about variants of study methodologies as well as importance of language acquisition in pluralist (in terms of variant languages used for instruction) secondary and post-secondary educational settings. A partial data analysis of a survey obtained from 95 participants of a high school in Albania is also reflected in regard with students` study skills.

Keywords: *foreground and background diversities, study skills, educational settings, self-awareness*

1-Introduction

Schooling can be traced back deep in history, where animal leathers are used to store data, cave walls used for talents and other purposes; nowadays, digital tablets, touch pads, smart boards, special schools with utmost utilities to serve both teachers and students are spreading all over the world, moreover, internet based schooling is widening the concept of school to anywhere, anytime, as the school walls started to tremble in front of internet schooling. On the other hand, different needs brought different approaches and strategies to solve the broad area of study skills. The 21st century skills require quite complex approaches.

The literature reviewed in this study isalso of the sample in search of these approaches.As the United States continues to compete in a global economy that demands innovation, US educational institutions give even more emphasis on the 21st century skills, which include critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation (Duran, et. al, 2012). Individual differences, mixed ability classes are some of other problems that require concrete solutions in today`s world. Learners' individual differences in learning English as a foreign language with large-mixed ability classes needs a great attention in increasing their communicative language skills.

One of Learners' differences is learning strategies. Learning strategy has a great role to promote students' autonomy (Mattarima, et. al, 2011). In educational institutions dropouts and truancy are becoming more and more dangerous. The issue of high school dropout has long concerned policy makers, educational professionals, and the general public. In the gifted literature, this concern is no less pressing. Student engagement is becoming an increasingly discussed construct for conceptualizing the dropout phenomenon and designing appropriate interventions to prevent this phenomenon (Landis, et. al, 2013).

2- Literature Review

The studies are emphasizing different approaches and methodologies in order to obtain data on different sides of study skills with

the aim of providing valuable solutions or suggestions to the problems encountered on the issue, both by teachers and students. One of the cornerstones of successful students' learning is their ability to use appropriate learning approaches.

The studies in this field are samples of these vast area each of which are to hold key roles in improving study skills through variant approaches. A case study aiming to build a bridge between learning and teaching through recognition of student`s learning approaches (Malie, S. et. al, 2012). A paper examining the effects of school bonding on academic achievement (measured by math achievement scores) in a sample of 12th graders from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (Ingels, Pratt, Rogers, Siegel, &Stutts, 2005; Bryan, et. al, 2011). The other case study focused on a small high school, located on a college campus and designed to address the educational needs of gifted 9th- through 12th-grade students. Eight teachers who taught 9th and12th grade classes and their 60 students were observed (Ratcliff, et. al, 2012).

Awareness and orchestration of learning approaches are central to self-regulation of learning—a key concept in explaining effective learning (Malie, S. et. al, 2012). Maile`s article also presented a detailed background study on the topic; There are volumes of research investigating the relationship between best practices in teaching by teachers and best practices in learning by students. Authors mentioned Malie, S. in this field include Biggs, Entwistle, Ramsden, Marton, Saljo, Trigwell, Prosser, Kember, Felder and others (Malie, S. et. al, 2012). Other findings indicate that students have different levels of motivation, different attitudes about teaching and learning and different responses to specific classroom environments and instructional practice (Felder and Brent, 2005; Malie, S. et. al, 2012). The role of school is one of the key components in providing a better setting for learning and teaching, a sense of attachment to the school on the student side would bring fruitful results; when students feel connected to or have strong bonds to their schools, they are more likely to experience academic success. They stay in school longer and attend school regularly (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2009b). Yet only about 50% of the youth in schools report feeling connected to or engaged in school (Blum, 2005; Bryan, et. al, 2011). On the other hand, students with different needs may require special approaches and care. Especially, if the students are gifted,

extra effort is needed to provide appropriate school setting, and qualified teachers to approach their possibly hidden talents. Developing an appropriate learning environment is a critical factor in the successful instruction of gifted students. Hennessey (2004) noted that close attention must be paid to creating appropriate learning environments if student motivation, creativity, and special talents are to be augmented (Ratcliff, et. al, 2012).

The literature mainly agrees upon the fact that students` learning approaches and strategies are not merely enough to achieve academic success or a satisfactory learning. A holistic approach and strategies are needed to gain a better performance: Studies have also revealed that students use different learning approaches and strategies and these in turn influence their academic achievement. However, students' learning approaches and strategies are not the sole factors that impact their academic achievement (Malie, S. et. al, 2012). Even when the topic is limited to a particular part of the whole as in school bonding, the need for varying it is inevitable. They found that school bonding was multidimensional with four specific components: (a) attachment to school, (b) attachment to teachers and school personnel, (c) school commitment (comprising both beliefs and behaviors), and (d) school involvement (Bryan, et. al, 2011). In school where only gifted students are taught, the school and classroom setting can be valued together with teachers` effective roles. An implication of this study is that high-ability students respond to classroom environments that are active and engaging, despite the use of whole-class grouping, direct instruction, and low-level questions. These students performed well in quickly paced, stimulating environments where the teachers mentally engaged (interacted) with students through direct instruction (Ratcliff, et. al, 2012).

Although the literature review reflects different objectives and tries to enlighten the unsought parts of the approaches to the study skills, they mainly conclude on the fact that one factor on the student or teacher side is not quite eminent as the effects on the study skills indicate different variables. Groves (2005) reveals evidence that lends support to the notion that the learning approach is likely to be influenced by many factors other than the curriculum style, including teaching quality, type of assessment and learner characteristics such as personality type, age and previous work or academic experience (Malie, S. et. al, 2012). Case studies brought valuable results that help

us overcome difficulties encountered in particular moments with particular needs. Although some case studies were in settings that might be considered ideal for teaching, it is important to consider how the observed teacher behaviors and student–teacher interactions can be generalized to foster positive learning environments in traditional high school classrooms (Ratcliff, et. al, 2012). The findings of such case studies demonstrated that all four components of school bonding affect students' academic achievement at some point during high school, whether the effects are proximal or distal (Bryan, et. al, 2011).

3-   **Methodology**

       The article is partially based on statistical data collected from a pilot study of a survey implemented on high school students in Albania measuring their attachments to their schools as well as their study skills in relation with their connectedness to their school. The data is reflected through two tables; indicating a) students'` feelings for school and b) their belief in studying as well as skills in regard with the conventional notion of hardworking. Secondary data together with literature on the issue is also used to present other viewpoints and support the main framework of ideas reflected throughout the article. The tables are accurately reflecting the positive correlation between study skills and students` feelings towards school settings and belief in hardworking with predetermined study skills. Secondary data also shows implications and importance of study skills for school psychology among high school students. The research question of; is there a relation between study skills, academic achievement and school connectedness is sought throughout the article to be answered by above mentioned measurement tools.

4-   **Educational Settings**

       Work environments and different workforce and manpower requirement also determine on the strategies and study skills. In the last two decades, contemporary work environments required fundamental changes in the profiles of the work force, which basically stemmed from the rapid change and transformation in the nature of

information. For societies to survive in this competitive world, it is necessary to equip individuals with skills to conduct research, use and transform information, think critically and reflectively, and make higher order decisions (Duran, et. al, 2012). Teaching and learning process also require student and teacher oriented approaches. Shift in teaching and learning process from teacher-centered to learner-centered needs more various pro-student approaches. The approaches focus on students' learning activities. In doing their activities, students apply different efforts because of having different individual potencies. From these individual differences, they also learn in different ways (Mattarima, et. al, 2011). Dropouts could be justified among mainstream schools, but when seen among gifted students and schools with gifted definitely reflect deeper problems of our age. Dropout among those identified as gifted is a puzzling irony for educators. Gifted students, by definition, demonstrate potential for high scholastic achievement (No Child Left Behind Act, 2004). Indeed, a common criterion for gifted identification is scoring at or above the 95th to 97th percentile on a standardized achievement measure (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). In addition, teacher nominations serve as a common source for initiating the identification process for gifted students (McBee, 2006; Oakland &Rossen, 2005)(Landis, et. al, 2013).

The surroundings and facilities of a school shouldn`t be separate from the idea of safety as academic achievement is correlated with students` sense of safety in regard with feeling comfortable to receive information, otherwise his or her receptions will be closed to outer inputs. Following figure reflects the numeric data obtained from a school in Albania in regard with feeling safe at school. ``*Findings suggest that students' sense of safety may be positively linked to academic achievement through their prior academic achievement*``(Bryan et. al, 2012)
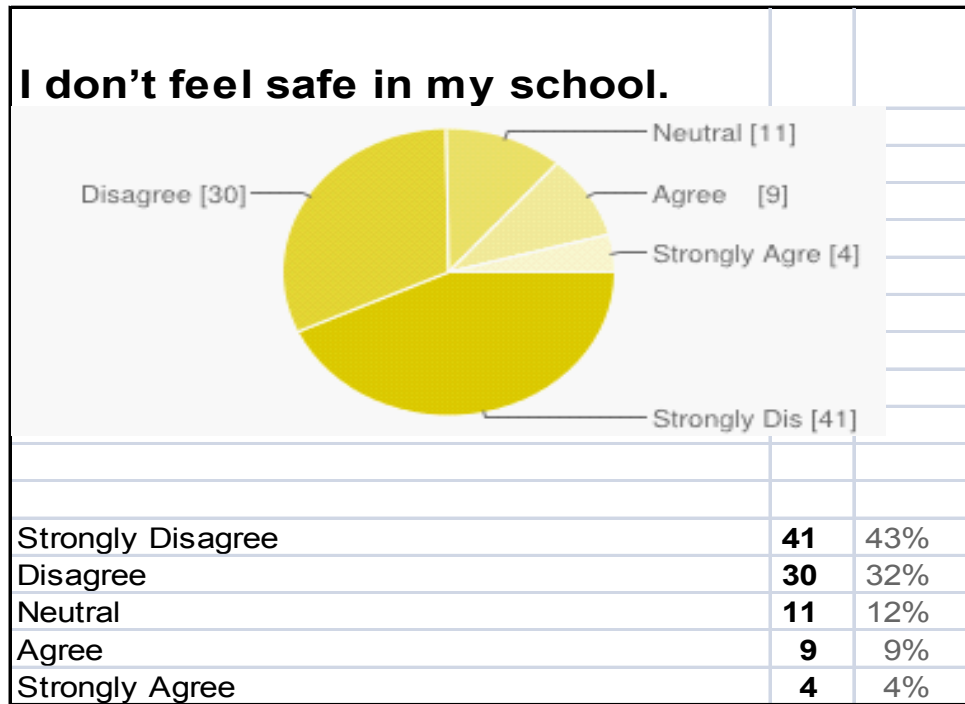
I don't feel safe in my school.

Disagree [30]

Neutral [11]

Agree [9]

Strongly Agre [4]

Strongly Dis [41]

Strongly Disagree	41	43%
Disagree	30	32%
Neutral	11	12%
Agree	9	9%
Strongly Agree	4	4%

Figure 1 Indicates percentages for one of 5 question types of feelings about being at School

5-   Study Skills And Critical Thinking

Thinking at our age needs to be critical; higher order thinking skills like critical thinking, and problem solving are considered necessary skills for 21st century individuals. Thus, it is necessary to examine these notions objectively, study on the contents of these skills, and elaborate on the ways to equip individuals with such skills (Duran, et. al, 2012). Foreign languages should be taught with learner centered approaches; furthermore, because of different learning characteristics, Hannell (2008) argued that learning outcome can be different. Some students are found learning very easy but some others are found learning tougher and may comprise special needs. Their individual characteristics (like curious or apathetic, persistent or easily defeated, overly cautious or willing to take sensible risks and so on) will create the independence in learning.

One of the questions asked in the survey was about their in-

terest in learning in regard with their study skills. The following figure reflects the numeric value obtained from 95 samples in an Albanian school. As observed 50+35 = 85% of students are interested in learning showing high scales of interest in learning, whereas 12% being neutral, leaves only 3% of negative responses.The data also indicates the significance of individual level of interest in learning as ``*few studies have tested specifically whether the effects of school belonging act at the individual or the school level.* `` (Demanet, et. al, 2012).

11. Don't you believe it is important to work hard at school?

Agree [26]
Strongly Agr [24]
Neutral [5]
Strongly Dis [21]
Disagree [19]

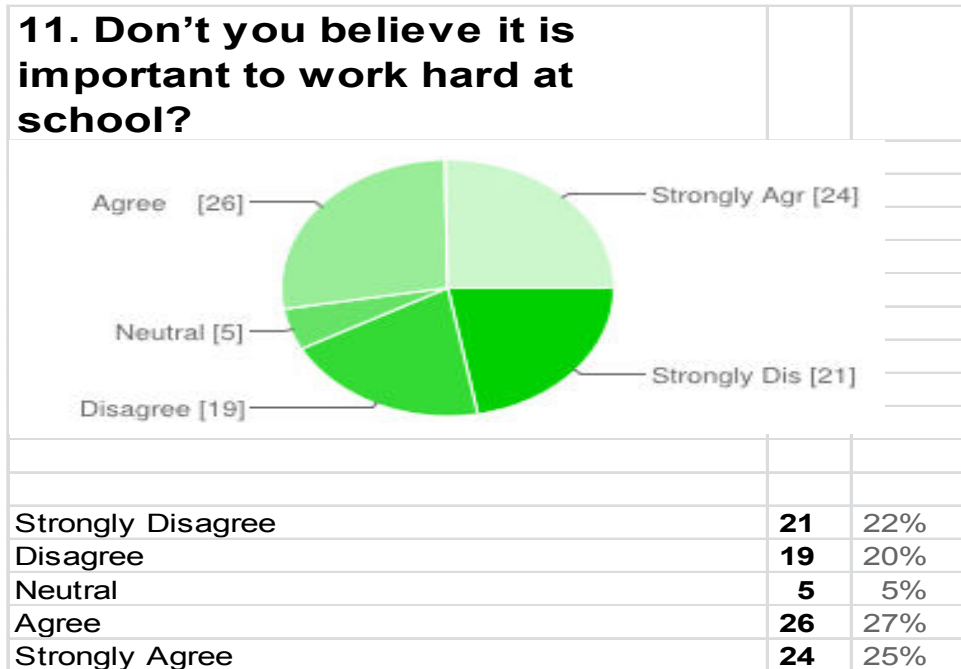|		
Strongly Disagree	**21**	22%
Disagree	**19**	20%
Neutral	**5**	5%
Agree	**26**	27%
Strongly Agree	**24**	25%

Figure 2 Indicates percentages for one of 5 question types of interest in learning in regard with study skills

The level of independence would create significant difference to the quality of their learning (Mattarima, et. al, 2011). School attachment should be reconsidered as more students are inclining to negative behaviors such as truancy and dropouts.The small gifted dropout literature base indicates that gifted student who dropout does so for a number of reasons, many of which are no different from the reasons expressed by the general population. For example, poor attendance, school failure, dislike of school, drug and alcohol use/abuse, learn-

ing disabilities, pregnancy, and family conflict are some of the many factors that have emerged in the research regarding gifted students dropping out of high school (Cramond, Kuss, &Nordin, 2007; Hansen &Toso, 2007; Matthews, 2006; Renzulli& Park, 2000, 2002) (Landis, et. al, 2013).

6 -Conclusion

As observed throughout the articles reviewed, today`s requirements are quite variant, technological developments brought great opportunities for teaching and learning strategies, nevertheless each improvement brought other problems that need to be dealt with.IT/ STEM experiences supported through technology-enhanced, inquiry and design-based collaborative learning strategies seem to have significant impact on development of critical thinking of urban high school students. The improvement is specifically evident in inference and inductive reasoning areas of critical thinking (Duran, et. al, 2012). Focus to understand students' learning strategies may lead teachers to promote students' autonomy in learning. So, it is a must for teachers to carefully understand their students' strategies before, whilst, and after learning process. Green, J. M. and R. Oxford (1995) stated that the more that teachers know about such factors, the more readily the teacher can come to grips with the nature of individual differences in the classroom (Mattarima, et. al, 2011). The gifted student who is at risk for dropping out is all too easy to overlook. Early performance on measures of aptitude and achievement may blind educators to the possibility of failure for these students.Applying the construct of engagement to the phenomena of underachievement and gifted dropout is an important course for research (Landis, et. al, 2013).

As students and teachers are centered on the same goals in terms of academic success through approaches used in study skills, the problems such as difficulties in language acquisition and other related educational challenges should be dealt with positive approaches and the usage of right methodology for each particular problem. Involvement of parents, teachers, and friends is quite essential in obtaining the right skill for the right subject as well as decision making process in post-secondary education (Coskun, L. et. al, 2014) and reaching goals mentioned earlier. Technology could also provide great opportunities when used in a good way and in good hands, otherwise, it could bring disastrous results in teaching and learning.

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