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Study habits and academic performance in physiology content in medical students

Hábitos de estudio y rendimiento académico en contenidos de fisiología en estudiantes de Medicina

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study habits of university students play a fundamental role in academic performance, so the current trend is to encourage productive study habits in students.

Objective: to determine the relationship between study habits and academic performance in physiology content taught in the subject cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive and renal systems of the second year of the medical degree at the Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, during the 2022 academic year.

Methods: an analytical, cross-sectional observational study was carried out on 72 students from the institution, period and previously stated objective. Two questionnaires were applied, in which the variables: age, sex, study habits and academic performance were collected. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data processing.

Results: 65,28% of the students achieved high academic performance, with a slight predominance of the female sex; inadequate study habits were observed in none of them. The dimensions "study space and environment" and "motivation to study" showed 82,98% and 80,85% of students in the very suitable category respectively. There was a statistically significant association between academic performance, study habits and their dimensions.

Conclusions: the relationship between study habits and academic performance in physiology content achieved by medical students was determined.

RESUMEN

Introducción: los hábitos de estudio de los alumnos universitarios, juegan un papel fundamental en el rendimiento académico, por lo que la tendencia actual es incentivar en el estudiantado hábitos de estudio productivos.

Objetivo: determinar la relación entre hábitos de estudio y rendimiento académico en

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contenidos de fisiología impartidos en la asignatura Sistemas cardiovascular, respiratorio, digestivo y renal del segundo año de la carrera de medicina de la Filial de Ciencias Médicas de Puerto Padre, durante el curso 2022.

Métodos: se realizó un estudio observacional analítico, de corte transversal, en 72 estudiantes, de la institución, período y objetivo antes declarado. Se aplicaron dos cuestionarios, en los que se recogieron las variables, edad, sexo, hábitos de estudio y rendimiento académico. En el procesamiento de los datos se utilizó la estadística descriptiva e inferencial.

Resultados: el 65,28 % de los estudiantes alcanzó un rendimiento académico alto, con un ligero predominio del sexo femenino, en ninguno de ellos se observaron hábitos de estudio inadecuados. Las dimensiones "espacio y ambiente de estudio" y "motivación por el estudio" exhibieron un 82,98 % y 80,85 % de estudiantes en la categoría muy adecuado respectivamente. Existió asociación estadísticamente significativa entre rendimiento académico, hábitos de estudio y sus dimensiones.

Conclusiones: se determinó la relación entre los hábitos de estudio y el rendimiento académico en contenidos de fisiología alcanzado por los estudiantes de medicina.

INTRODUCTION

The results achieved by students in their respective courses, whether quantitative or qualitative, define academic performance. This is an indicator of the level of learning achieved by the student[1]. In university institutions, it represents a strategic indicator for the assessment of educational quality in higher education[2].

The study habit is a routine action in which behavioral repetition over time generates an unconscious mechanism that makes it easier and more effective; in this way, the student plans his time and organizes himself by applying specific techniques and methods to study and acquire skills[3,4].

Currently, productive study habits are referred to as finishing tasks on time, keeping the material in order, studying with a strategy and in an appropriate environment, underlining, making outlines, among others; and unproductive habits such as postponing academic activities, studying in an inappropriate environment and without an orderly strategy, studying when tired, copying summaries from classmates, among others[5].

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Interest in study habits in university students has become a topic of interest. The practice of inappropriate techniques leads to students having serious difficulties throughout their university life, all of which is reflected by the low skills acquired by students in the different subjects and is evidenced by the low academic performance in the classroom and in their future professional life6.

At the Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, research has been carried out to characterize the academic performance of students. One of the variables analyzed was the study habit, which in these cases was addressed globally, without taking into account its particularities, "dimensions".

Study habits and their "dimensions" are treated by different authors[7] through questionnaires validated for higher education. These provide specific information that allows teachers to more effectively interpret, organize, guide and control the independent study of their students[8], therefore the present article aims to relate the academic performance achieved in physiology contents taught in the subject Cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive and renal systems with the study habits of second-year Medicine students at the Puerto Padre Medical Sciences Branch, during the 2022 academic year.

METHOD

An analytical, cross-sectional, observational study was conducted on second-year medical students at the Puerto Padre Medical Sciences Branch, during the second period of the 2022 academic year.

The universe consisted of 72 students enrolled in the second year of the medical degree, who took the course and who voluntarily agreed to be part of the study, to whom two instruments were applied: a questionnaire developed and validated by the authors and another approved and applied in higher education, on study habits designed by Valle et al.9 The entire universe was worked with, so no sample design was required.

The instrument to determine the quality of study habits is composed of a total of 29 questions distributed in four dimensions: D1: study space and environment, D2: study time and planning, D3: study method and D4: motivation for study. The responses used an ordinal Likert-type scale, in relation to the degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the series of statements (always: 5 values; almost always: 4 values; sometimes: 3 values; almost never: 2 values and never: 1 value). To

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evaluate these dimensions, the points obtained in each of the questions corresponding to the dimension studied were added up, proceeding as follows:

Dimension 1: very adequate (score greater than 19 values), adequate (score between 12 and 18 values) and inadequate (scores less than 11 values).

Dimension 2: 3 and 4 (same scale on all three): very adequate (score greater than 30 values), adequate (score between 19 and 29 values) and inadequate (18 values or less)

The following range was used to grade the final result of the instrument: very adequate (greater than or equal to 110 values), adequate (between 70 and 109 values) and inadequate (69 values or less).

The variables analyzed were age, sex, overall study habits and their dimensions (D:1, D:2, D:3 and D:4) and results in physiology content.

The database and statistical analysis were done through the STATGRAPHICS Centurion program. Version 15.01. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used; frequency distributions were used as summary measures for qualitative variables and the mean and standard deviation for quantitative variables. The analysis to determine the association between each of the variables was performed using the Chi-square and ANOVA tests, and the correlation between the variables was determined using Pearson's linear correlation coefficient ($r \geq 0.3$). $p \leq 0.05$ (95% reliability) was considered as the level of statistical significance.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of students according to academic performance and study habits. Of the students who achieved high academic performance, 28 (59.57%) practiced very adequate study habits and the rest, 19 (40.43%), adequate habits. In students with low academic performance, only 16% had very adequate study habits and 20% had inadequate habits. Statistical analysis through chi-square showed that there are significant differences between these results ($X2=18.238$; $p=0.0001$).

Table 1. Distribution of students according to academic performance and study habits. Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, during the second period of the 2022 academic year.

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Study habits	Poor performance n=25		High performance n=47	
	No.	%	No.	%
Very appropriate	4	16,0	28	59,57
appropriate	16	64,0	19	40,43
Inappropriate	5	20,0	0	0

X^2=18,238; p=0,0001

Source: Database

The distribution of students according to academic performance and dimensions of study habits is reflected in **table 2**. This shows a marked predominance in high-performing students with a very adequate classification in all the dimensions analyzed, with the dimensions "study space and environment" and "motivation for study" standing out, with 82.98% and 80.85% respectively. In the lower-performing students, the analysis of the dimensions reflects a lower percentage of students with a very adequate classification. Likewise, except in the "motivation for study" dimension, in the others students with an inadequate classification were included. The statistical analysis through chi-square showed significant differences in the comparison of these four dimensions between both groups of students ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Distribution of students according to academic performance and dimensions of study habits. Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, during the second period of the 2022 academic year.

Dimensions		Poor performance n=25		High Performance n=47		X^2	P
		No	%	No	%		
	Very appropriate	14	56,0	39	82,98	7,863	0,0196

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Study space and environment	appropriate	9	36,0	8	17,02		
	Inappropriate	2	8,0	0	0,0		
Study time and planning	Very appropriate	3	12,0	15	31,91	11,441	0,0033
	appropriate	13	52,0	29	61,7		
	inappropriate	9	36,0	3	6,38		
Study method	Very appropriate	2	8,0	30	63,83	24,572	0,0000
	appropriate	16	64,0	16	34,04		
	inappropriate	7	28,0	1	2,13		
Motivation for study	Very appropriate	12	48,0	38	80,85	8,300	0,0040
	appropriate	13	52,0	9	19,15		
	inappropriate	0	0,0	0	0,0		

Source: Database

The distribution of students according to academic performance, study habits, and sex, reflected in **Table 3**, shows that in both sexes the best results are seen in students with very adequate and appropriate study habits, with a slight predominance in the female sex, the statistical analysis through the ANOVA test shows very significant differences, (F-Ratio = 5.29; p = 0.0004).

Table 3. Distribution of students according to academic performance, study habits, and sex. Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, during the second period of the 2022 academic year.

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Study habits	Academic performance				F-Ratio	P
	Male		Female			
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE		
Very appropriate	4,28	0,47	4,36	0,52	5,29	0,0004
Appropriate	4,19	0,59	3,98	0,59		
Inappropriate	2,75	0,0	3,06	0,77		

Source: Database

As can be seen in **Table 4**, the correlation analysis between academic performance, study habits and their dimensions showed a statistically significant association between performance and all the variables examined. Study habits (global) (r=-0.5331; p=0.0000), dimension 4 (motivation for study), (r=0.5125; p=0.0000) and dimension 3 (study methods), (r=0.4929; p=0.0000), were the variables that showed the best correlations with academic performance.

Table 4. Pearson Linear Correlation Coefficient between academic performance in physiology and study habits and their dimensions. Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, during the second period of the 2022 academic year.

Hábitos de estudio/Dimensiones	**Academic performance**	
	R	P
Global	0,5331	0,0000
D1: Study space and environment	0,3769	0,0011
D2: Study time and planning	0,3601	0,0019
D3: Study method	0,4929	0,0000

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D4: Motivation for study	0,5125	0,0000

DISCUSSION

Success in learning, according to different studies[10,11], not only depends on the development of cognitive skills and effort, but also on the attitude and motivation of the student and the main habits acquired during his personal development[12]. This, according to the authors, is due to the acquisition of tools that guarantee a greater source of knowledge, such as the habit of reading, writing, paying attention to conversations, among others.

In the article "Relationship between study habits and academic performance of students from accredited professional schools"[13] the authors used the study habits questionnaire proposed by Chung (2008) and identified 678 students (85.7%) with a predominance of very adequate study habits and satisfactory academic results, with the highest percentages in the dimensions "space and environment" and "motivation for study". Inadequate study habits prevailed in those with low academic performance in 113 students (14.28%). In this work, similar to what was found in the present study, a significant association between these two variables was demonstrated.

The space and study environment are elements to be taken into account for systematic study, so it is important to always study in the same place, thus creating an air-conditioned space that the student considers his or her own, a comfortable, orderly and quiet place to promote concentration, without bad odors, well ventilated and airy, with a pleasant temperature, without noise or other distractions.[6]

The motivation to study has been classified by several authors[13,14] as one of the most influential factors in the academic results of university students. Regarding this criterion, Ramírez et al.[5] demonstrated that the greater the motivation, the greater the study habit. Likewise, Martínez et al.[13] demonstrated that at the Medical Sciences Branch of Puerto Padre, a motivated student is three times more likely to achieve better results than one who is not. According to González et al.[14], the lack of motivation to study among university students is mainly due to the length of the content and the difficulty in integrating it. The data provided by the authors mentioned above coincide with those of

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this article. In the opinion of the authors, although a study plan as extensive as that of the Medicine degree can cause student demotivation, motivated students enjoy the time of independent study and dedicate more time to it.

Regarding study planning, Najarro6 points out that the first thing to plan is time, and he highlights the importance of organizing the study every day and at the same time, as it produces an inertia that favors a better use of study time, focused on acquiring knowledge, not as a mere formality to pass an exam, where each student has his own learning pace and the planning of time must be distributed according to his abilities, which will help him to perform satisfactorily. On the other hand, he adds that nowadays most of the time the student is a mere passive receiver, a repeater of the information received, does not perform critical reading, studies at the last minute, does not look for additional information to that provided in class, does not compare and reconstruct information, is not a proactive student capable of discovering, explaining and creating. A study conducted by professors from the "Victoria de Girón" Institute of Basic and Preclinical Sciences on 47 first-year medical students enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine of the Mandume Ya Ndemufayu University, in Huila, Angola, reported a higher percentage of students with very adequate and adequate study habits (97.87%). When analyzing the dimensions "time and study planning" it showed the lowest results, with a lower number of students in the very adequate category and a higher number in the inadequate category, results similar to those found in this article, mainly in students with low academic performance[11].

In the article "Effect of sex on the academic performance of students of health biology at Pompeu Fabra University", reference is made to the tendency of a greater number of women than men in all health sciences careers, since women are more likely to choose university studies that have components of service to society[14]. When analyzing the teaching results, these were similar between both sexes and were in line with the present research.

Martínez et al.[13] studied the factors that influenced the academic performance of medical students during the first five years of the degree. These authors report that 68.96% of the students were female and of them, 47.12% showed high performance, as opposed to males who exhibited only 26.43% of students with high performance.

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On the other hand, Cala et al.[15], in students with low academic performance in the Clinical Pharmacology subject of the Faculty No. 1 of the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba found that 79.43% of the students were female. Data that are inconsistent with those provided by this article. This may be determined by the decrease in interest in studying after the increase in years of study[16].

In the article "Characterization of study habits in students of medical sciences", the distribution of time was the indicator that reflected deficiency; 55% of the students who made up the sample did not plan a study schedule that would help them achieve greater academic performance[10]. In accordance with the above, a study carried out on students of the Bachelor of Business Administration at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador found that 15.7% of the students had poor study habits, considering the study hours too short to concentrate or feeling unmotivated towards studying, in addition to not distributing time well, dedicating too many hours to some activities and too few to others, in contrast to 6.5% of the students who had optimal habits and stated that they dedicated little or no time to television, cinema and other related activities, in addition to not having an excessive social life[7], on the contrary, in a study carried out at the Latino Private Educational Institution, 72.3% of the students reflected an adequate distribution of time for their study[17].

Campos[18], in his thesis on study habits and academic performance at the National University of Engineering in Lima identified 47.1% of students with an inadequate study method. Likewise, Matencio[1] found that at the San Ramón Vocational Training Center 34.3% and 18.6% of students had study methods in the negative and very negative categories, respectively.

On the other hand, in a study carried out at the Faculty of Education of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, it was observed that the majority of first semester students underline the topics to understand what they read, they also emphasize the meanings they do not know and immediately look them up in the dictionary, they ask questions and answer them in their own language, which shows the effort to grasp the ideas, they try to relate the topics with others already studied and do not use a memorization strategy, thus concretizing very positive and positive study habits in 42.4% and with a positive tendency in 37.1%[4].

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CONCLUSIONS

Academic performance was higher in students who had very adequate and appropriate study habits, who studied more frequently and who dedicated a greater number of hours to independent study.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in the conduct of the research.

DECLARATION OF FINANCING

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