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## A New Study Habits Inventory: Description and Utilization

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# A New Study Habits Inventory: Description and Utilization

Mark E. Thompson

## **Abstract**

Study habits inventories have successfully identified a proclivity for academic achievement not accounted for by ability. These inventories may be identifying a motivational trait that is difficult to chart by using traditional ability measures. The concept of motivation is quite difficult to pin down, and professional educators often turn to their particular notions of motivation when explaining success or failure. Motivation has been characterized as a conceptual charlady widely used for sweeping up variance in academic attainment unaccounted for by traditional intellectual or educational variables (Entwistle, et al., 1974).

# A NEW STUDY HABITS INVENTORY: DESCRIPTION AND UTILIZATION

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Study habits inventories have successfully identified a proclivity for academic achievement not accounted for by ability. These inventories may be identifying a motivational trait that is difficult to chart by using traditional ability measures. The concept of motivation is quite difficult to pin down, and professional educators often turn to their particular notions of motivation when explaining success or failure. Motivation has been characterized as a conceptual charlady widely used for sweeping up variance in academic attainment unaccounted for by traditional intellectual or educational variables (Entwistle, et al., 1974).

The rationale for using study habits inventories is to identify certain non-intellectual traits that might influence academic achievement. Lavin (1965) did a massive study on the prediction of academic performance (300 studies reviewed and analyzed), and found ability accounts for 35 to 45 percent of the variation in grades. No other single factor accounts for this much variation, yet more than half remains unexplained. Other researchers, as well as Lavin (1965), have recommended that future efforts be directed to finding variables that are non-intellective in nature to help account for the remaining variation. Study habits and attitudes are considered to be non-intellective factors that do correspond to grades for high school and college students.

This article will report on a new study habits inventory developed in Britain by N. J. Entwistle. The Entwistle Inventory is short (47 true/false items) and is not protected by copyright laws. A brief history of study habits inventories in this country will be introduced prior to a description of the Entwistle Inventory.

## *Appraisal of Study Methods Inventories*

In 1933, Wrenn published one of the first study habits inventories in the United States (Brown & Holtzman, 1955). Wrenn's inventory was originally designed for men, but was modified later for women (Wrenn & Humber, 1941). An attempt was made to determine the extent to which study habit items could be used to predict academically successful or unsuccessful students. Wrenn believed study habits might correspond to academic success if ability was controlled. The work done by Wrenn in the 1930s and 40s has been expanded by other researchers interested in study methods. Brown and Holtzman have concentrated on study methods inventories and found that attitudes toward the academic environment are significantly related to achievement (Brown, 1972). The Brown-Holtzman Survey of Study Habits Attitudes (SSHA) Inventory is generally acknowledged as one of the best study habit attitude inventories in the United States.

Brown and Holtzman introduced a questionnaire concerning study habits and attitudes in 1953; the original inventory had 75 items. There have been several revisions (the most recent in 1967), and the length of the inventory is now 100 items. This inventory which is widely used as a research tool has four scales:

- 1) Work methods—use of effective study procedures, skill and efficiency in doing academic assignments;
- 2) Delay avoidance—promptness in completing assignments and ability to resist distractions;
- 3) Teacher approval—feelings and opinions about teachers, their classroom behavior, and their methods;
- 4) Educational acceptance—approval of educational objectives, practices and requirements.

The scales of work methods and delay avoidance are classified as study habits. Teacher approval and educational acceptance scales are classified as study attitudes.

There have been numerous research studies that link scores on the Brown-Holtzman SSHA with academic success (Holtzman, et. al., 1954; Brown & Holtzman, 1956; Ikenberry, 1966; Pepper, 1970; Phillips, 1970; Brown, 1972; Goldfried & Zurilla, 1973; and Shaffer, 1973). One of the purposes of the SSHA is to identify students whose study habits and attitudes are different from those of students who earn high grades.

The logic for using study methods as a predictive variable in college is related to the environmental differences between high school and college. In public high schools, students receive greater support from their teachers. College teachers present more depth and expect independent work from their students. The need for independent study increases as the student progresses in higher education. It is essential for college and university students to adapt quickly to the new learning environment and to accept responsibility for academic development. The student most likely to be more successful than others may exhibit better study habits, and adapt more easily to academic norms and requirements of the college. Consequently, the student may become more self-confident about his or her ability and have the personality characteristics for successful independent study (Hewitt, 1973).

Informing students of the procedures and techniques used by successful students has helped to improve grade point averages (GPA). These procedures have been packaged in the form of manuals and special courses to be used as required by the student. An emphasis on organization, reading flexibility, note taking, examination technique and regular study habits are usually presented.

How-to-study manuals and study skills courses have been popular for a number of years. Thirty-eight how-to-study manuals were published between 1926 and 1939 (Laycock & Russell, 1941). Brown and Holtzman (1955) stated that more than 200 how-to-study manuals were published between 1926 and 1955. In 1960 Entwistle reviewed the literature, and made evaluations of 22 study skills courses. Entwistle concluded:

- 1) A study skills course will usually be followed by improvement.
- 2) A course will be most beneficial for students desiring to take it.
- 3) Students wishing to take a study skills course but prevented from doing so, and therefore presumably of comparable motivation to those enrolled, fail to show significant improvement.
- 4) Any gains noted will not necessarily be related to either the content or the duration of the course.

In summary, one might conclude that a study habits inventory does provide information about students not indicated by ability measures. This information might be helpful to high risk students. Entwistle, et al., (1971) have developed a study habits inventory for a British population that correlates .77 with the Brown-Holtzman SSHA. This inventory will be discussed and analyzed.

#### *Development of the Entwistle Student Attitudes Inventory*

Entwistle has done considerable research in England on the topic of achievement in higher education. Self-report inventories designed to tap the more specific dimensions of academic motivation have been a particular interest of his. The dimensions of academic motivation appear to have been conceptualized in terms of a type of intrinsic motivation which links competitive academic attainment with self-esteem (Entwistle, et al., 1974).

One of the Entwistle's first studies aimed at identifying factors of academic motivation was reported in 1968. This study was conducted at Aberdeen, Scotland, with 2,707 students aged 13, using a self-rating inventory. The inventory was constructed to assess academic motivation and contained 24 true/false items. Entwistle (1968) reported that he was influenced by research in the United States that attempted to relate academic motivation to the more general trait of achievement motivation. He was particularly impressed with the research of Finger and Schlessler (1965) on academic motivation.

Entwistle, Nisbet, Entwistle and Cowell (1971) provided a detailed report on the new study habits inventory developed for British students in higher education. This inventory was called a Student Attitudes Inventory (SAI) and had 47 true/false items with four scales:

#### THE ENTWISTLE STUDENT ATTITUDES INVENTORY

Motivation (M)	14 questions
Study Methods (S)	14 questions
Exam Technique (E)	9 questions
Lack of Distraction (L)	10 questions

- S Background music helps me to study more effectively. (No)  
 M It is most unusual for me to be late handing in work. (Yes)  
 E I certainly want to pass the next set of exams, but it doesn't matter much if I only just scrape through. (No)  
 L - I haven't had any serious personal problems since I came here. (Yes)  
 S My habit of putting off work leaves me with far too much to do at the end of term. (No)

- M — I enjoy the challenge of a difficult new topic in lectures. (Yes)
- E — In exams I start writing almost straight away; there's not time to think out the answers beforehand. (No)
- L — If I have a sudden pain, I always think it may be something serious. (No)
- S — It's rather difficult for me to organise my study time: at school this was done for me. (No)
- M — I usually tackle the easy things first and leave the more difficult ones until the end. (No)
- E — I rarely seem to do myself justice in exams. (No)
- L — Sport or social activities take up a lot of my time. (No)
- S — I seem to have plenty of free time during the week. (No)
- M — I enjoy collecting things such as stamps, minerals, plants, etc. (Yes)
- E — I often find that my mind goes blank when I'm faced with a particularly difficult question. (No)
- L — I like to be in the swim of things: if there is anything going on I like to be there. (No)
- E — In exams I often have little or no time left to answer the last question. (No)
- L — I get depressed easily — too easily. (No)
- S — I don't find much time to study during the holidays. (No)
- M — I play any game to win, not just for the fun of it. (Yes)
- E — A poor first answer in an exam tends to make me panic. (No)
- S — My lecture notes are often difficult to decipher afterwards. (No)
- M — I sometimes wish I had gone straight into work after school. (No)
- L — Worrying about an exam or about work that's overdue often prevents me from sleeping. (No)
- S — I usually plan my week's work in advance, either on paper or in my head. (Yes)
- M — I get disheartened and give up easily if something is too difficult for me. (No)
- L — I enjoy lively parties. (No)
- S — I find it difficult to pick out the relevant points in a lecture unless they are written on the board or in a hand-out. (No)
- M — I can't see any relevance in most of the work we do here. (No)
- E — I feel nervous before an exam, but it seems to make me work better once I start. (Yes)
- S — I need to be in the right mood before I can study effectively. (No)
- M — I'm a pretty average student: I'll never be particularly good, so there's no point in striving to be something I'm not. (No)
- L — Money worries have distracted me from my work. (No)
- S — I find it difficult to keep awake during some lectures. (No)
- M — It is important for me to do really well in the courses here. (Yes)
- L — To work effectively, I need plenty of time for relaxation. (No)
- S — There seems to be little point in following up the references we are given in lectures. (No)

- M – It's not often that I can stick at work for more than an hour at a time. (No)
- E – Low marks in an exam make me ashamed. (Yes)
- S – There are very few of the recommended text-books which are really worth buying. (No)
- E – If I had to state my priorities at present, exam success would be near the top. (Yes)
- M – I hate admitting defeat, even in trivial matters. (Yes)
- S – I don't often join in tutorial discussions: I prefer to listen. (No)
- M – There's no point in trying to do things in a hurry: I prefer to take my time. (No)
- S – I'm rather slow at starting work in the evenings. (No)
- M – My friends always seem to be able to do things better than me. (No)
- L – I believe in taking an active part in societies and clubs. (No)

The items were initially allocated to two scales (motivation and study methods) (Entwistle & Wilson, 1970 and Entwistle & Entwistle, 1970). The items in the examination technique scale had been previously allocated to the study method scale. The questions composing the lack of distractions scale were taken from the motivation scale. Validity was inferred from correlations with the Brown-Holtzman scale (.77), independent measures of hard work (hours studied) and the criterion measure of academic performance.

Entwistle, et al., (1971) used 898 university students, 562 college of education students and 190 students in polytechnics and colleges of technology for the sample. The motivation and study methods scales showed the most consistent relationships with the criteria of academic performance. The lack of distractions scale produced the lowest correlations with the criteria of academic performance.

#### *Some Possible Uses for the Entwistle Inventory*

There has been a limited amount of research accomplished with the Entwistle Inventory in this country. A recent study completed with community college students indicated that attitudes toward study behavior, as reported by the Entwistle Inventory, do correspond to degrees of academic success (Thompson, 1975).

If students can be identified by attitudes concerning their study behavior, it may be possible to help them with specific clinical treatments (courses designed to improve their study effectiveness and specific skills such as reading). Thus, the Entwistle Inventory has the possibility of becoming a diagnostic instrument; moreover, it could also be used as a screening instrument for counselors. Additionally, this instrument can be used as a teaching aid by demonstrating to the student that effective study methods and motivational factors are important aspects of academic success.

It is recommended that counselors use the Entwistle Inventory as a clinical measure of attitudes toward study habits. This inventory does contribute measurably to the prediction of academic success. Students with measured low ability and high SAI scales would probably need a different

treatment strategy than students with high ability scores and a low SAI score.

An ability measure along with a study attitudes indicator will help professionals in the planning of remedial programs. This new study habits inventory might help.

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