



The Profile of Students and Their Study Strategies – A Diagnosis of the Strengths and Weaknesses of a Student Group in Relation to the Use of Study Strategies

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Abstract

In our study, we aim to define the profile of a group of students enrolled in the first year of an online undergraduate programme. Our sample consists of 166 students of both genders, with an average age of 42 years. We used a 35-item questionnaire as a data collection instrument, which enabled us to analyse the behaviour of these students. Statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicates a high level of internal consistency. The responses reveal strong confidence in their learning, realistic goal setting, self-awareness, and careful time management, with students planning tasks and study time in advance when preparing for assessments. The less positive aspect identified is the difficulty of studying with others or in groups. In summary, by developing and implementing study strategies tailored to the online context, students can maximise their learning, engagement, and academic success, as well as further develop their strategies for self-regulated learning.

Keywords: study strategies; online education; adult learners; self-regulation

1. Introduction

With technology advancing and the expansion of online education, understanding the learning strategies of students in this mode of education has become essential. Study strategies play a crucial role in academic success at all levels of education, from primary to postgraduate, and in all types of education, from in-person to online. Effective study strategies facilitate learning, retention, and application of knowledge in practical situations. Efficient use of these strategies helps students manage their time and organise academic tasks more effectively. Mastering learning strategies implies knowing what they are, when, why, and how to use them (Perassinoto et al., 2013). It's worth noting that these are adult students in an online context, where time management is crucial to balancing work, family, personal life, and academics (Jarvis, 2010). To achieve this, it is important for students to learn how to set study goals, create study schedules, and prioritise activities according to their importance

and urgency. Developing critical thinking is also crucial to ensure academic success. In online teaching, the instructor should act as a learning facilitator. According to Jarvis (2010), an adult educator should foster the need for specific learning by encouraging students to reflect and seek answers. Online students must be self-directed in their learning. This system assumes that students have self-control and independence from the instructor, being autonomous in their learning process. Reflective learning, as Giddens (1990) argues, requires constant examination and re-examination of practices. Therefore, in online teaching, instructors should create opportunities for students to reflect, be self-critical, and thereby develop autonomy in their learning process. Online learning environments should be designed to support students' success. Simpson (2012) suggests that failure and even dropout among students are often due to various factors, including personal issues. Helping students reflect on their study practices and learning strategies can provide them with extra support, allowing them to gain self-awareness, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and adjust fewer effective strategies.

According to Conceição and Lehman (2011), the role of the teacher in online education has evolved to require new skills. Often, they assume roles as instructional designers, tutors, mentors, assessors, and supporters. In the latter role, teachers can create initiatives that encourage students to self-reflect and incorporate the outcomes of this introspection into their future practices.

2. Methodology

2.1. Objectives

Our main objective was to outline the profile of study strategies used by a group of students in their learning process. A secondary objective was to emphasise the teacher's role in facilitating this reflection.

2.2. Sample

Our sample consists of 166 adult learners in online education, of which 88% are female and 12% male, with an average age of 42 years (Max. 75 – Min. 21). All are working students. All students completed the questionnaire voluntarily.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

In addition to demographic data, we used a questionnaire with 35 statements. Each statement was rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 corresponds to "ALWAYS" and 5 to "NEVER." Statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicates a high level of internal consistency (Alpha Cronbach 0,963). The questionnaire is divided into eight subscales, as presented below:

Table 1: Structure of the study strategies questionnaire

Subscale	No. of items	Alfa Cronbach	Example
A - Objectives and motivations	4	0,924	<i>I set realistic goals and work towards them</i>
B - Virtual class attendance	2	0,869	<i>I regularly access my virtual class</i>
C - Time management	5	0,788	<i>I have a study schedule with set times to study each subject/matter</i>
D - Communication	2	0,736	<i>I seek help from teachers when I need it</i>
E - General study strategies	10	0,897	<i>I use a diary to write down the most important information</i>
F - Reading comprehension	5	0,862	<i>I check the titles and the introduction before reading the chapters</i>
G - Grades	3	0,831	<i>I combine information from different texts</i>
H - Preparing for face-to-face exams	4	0,596	<i>I study for a face-to-face exam over several days</i>

Source: own (2024)

2.4. Procedure

The questionnaire was created in Google Docs and made available online. It was posted in the virtual classroom space of a course unit at the beginning of the semester. Students were asked to complete it voluntarily. There was no mandatory time limit for responses.

3. Results

The results will be presented subscale by subscale. We begin with Subscale A - Goals and Motivation.

Table 2. Results of the Objectives and Motivation subscale

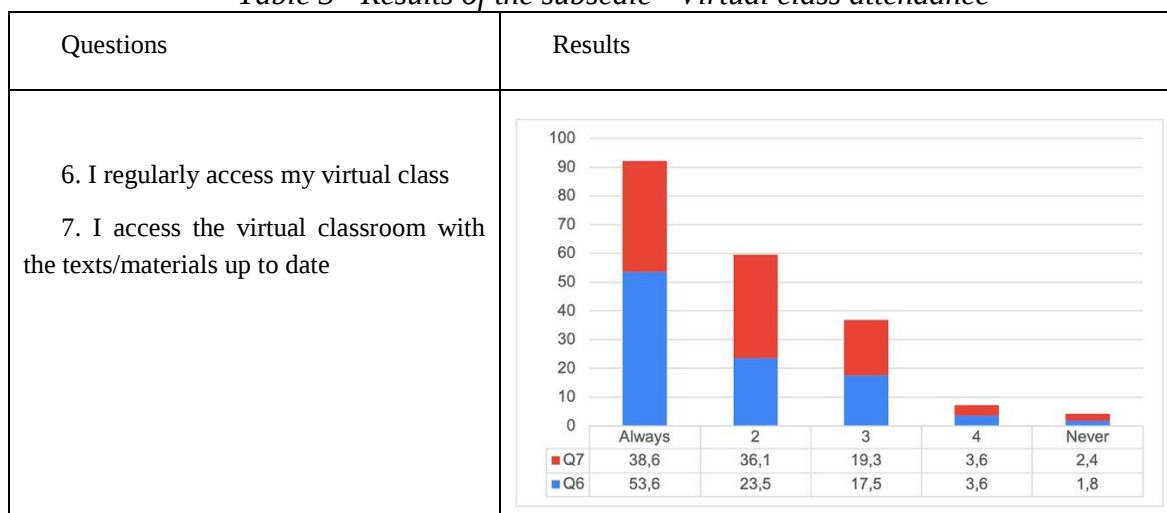
Table 2: Results of the Objectives and Motivation subscale																																			
Questions	Results																																		
1. I am confident about what I can do with my learning.	<table><tr><th></th><th>Always</th><th>2</th><th>3</th><th>4</th><th>Never</th></tr><tr><td>Q1</td><td>44,6</td><td>40,4</td><td>9,6</td><td>3,6</td><td>1,8</td></tr><tr><td>Q2</td><td>45,8</td><td>38</td><td>11,4</td><td>3</td><td>1,8</td></tr><tr><td>Q3</td><td>47</td><td>34,9</td><td>13,3</td><td>3,6</td><td>1,2</td></tr><tr><td>Q4</td><td>44</td><td>35,5</td><td>15,7</td><td>3</td><td>1,8</td></tr></table>						Always	2	3	4	Never	Q1	44,6	40,4	9,6	3,6	1,8	Q2	45,8	38	11,4	3	1,8	Q3	47	34,9	13,3	3,6	1,2	Q4	44	35,5	15,7	3	1,8
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Q3	47	34,9	13,3	3,6	1,2																														
Q4	44	35,5	15,7	3	1,8																														
2. I have a positive and optimistic attitude towards my learning																																			
3. I set realistic goals and work towards them																																			
4. I know my strengths and how to use them to achieve success																																			

Source: own (2024)

In terms of goals and motivation, this group of students displays high confidence and a positive attitude towards their learning. However, confidence is more pronounced when it comes to setting learning goals.

Regarding virtual classroom attendance, the table below presents the following results.

Table 3 - Results of the subscale - Virtual class attendance

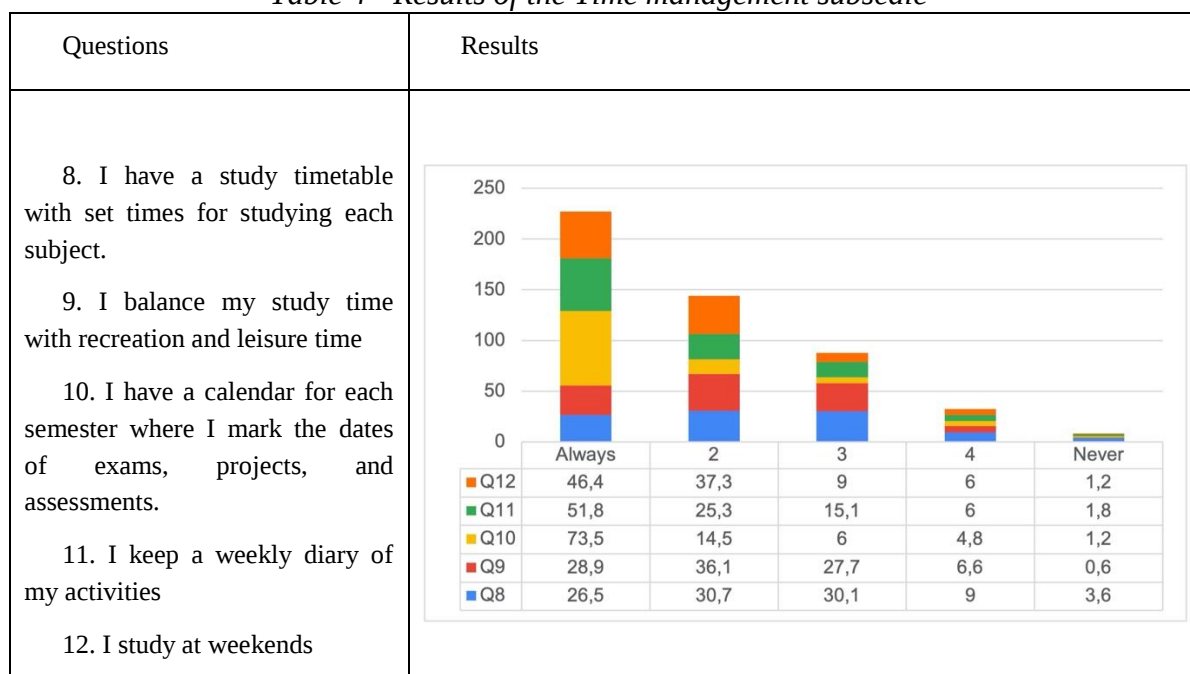


Source: own (2024)

It is evident that while students regularly access their virtual classroom, they do not always keep up to date with readings and assignments.

In table 4, we present the results for time management subscale. The most notable result shows the presence of a calendar for each semester, where important events are scheduled, along with a weekly plan for activities. Most students also report studying on weekends.

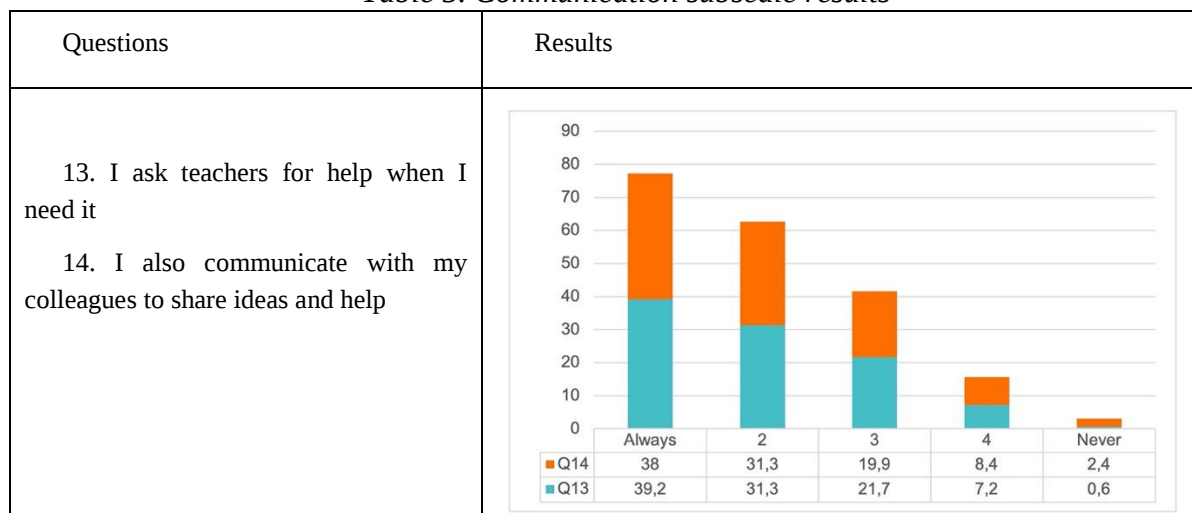
Table 4 - Results of the Time management subscale



Source: own (2024)

In terms of communication, the results are not as strong, whether in relation to teachers or peers.

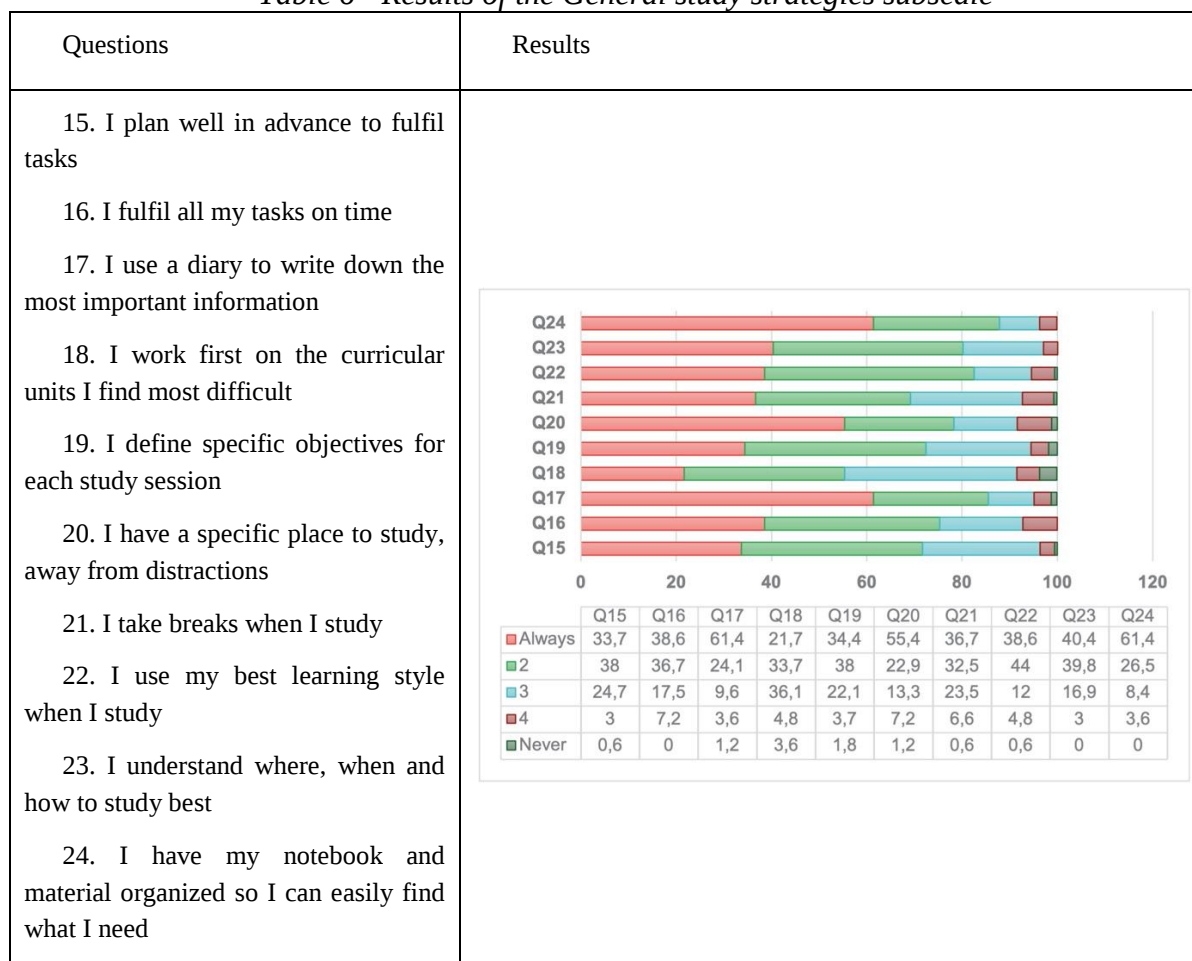
Table 5. Communication subscale results



Source: own (2024)

We can find a variety of study strategies among these students. Like the time management results, the most widely used aspects here include maintaining a journal to record key information, with an organised approach for easy access. Students also report having a specific study area free from distractions.

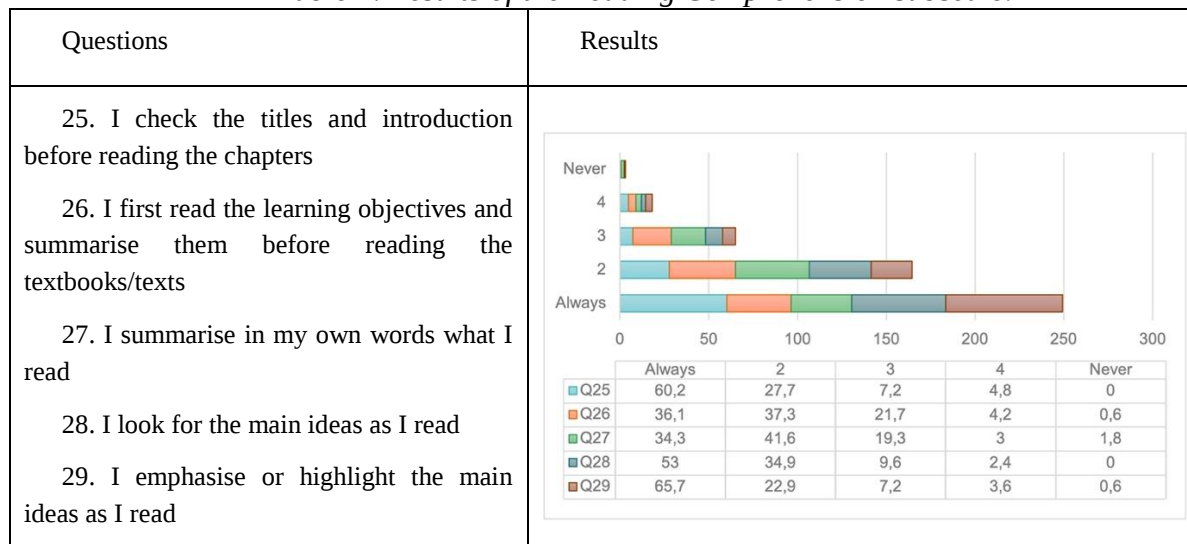
Table 6 - Results of the General study strategies subscale



Source: own (2024)

In terms of reading and comprehension strategies, students report reading titles and introductions first to better understand the content. Searching for main ideas and highlighting key points are also strategies used by nearly all students.

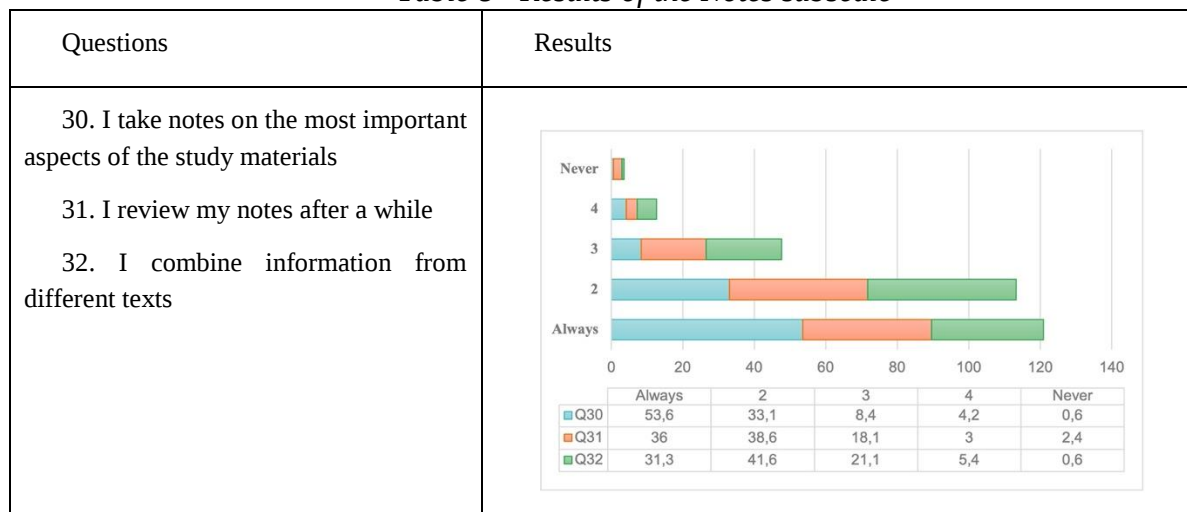
Table 7. Results of the Reading Comprehension subscale.



Source: own (2024)

Regarding notetaking, students state they take notes on the key aspects of study materials, combining information from various sources.

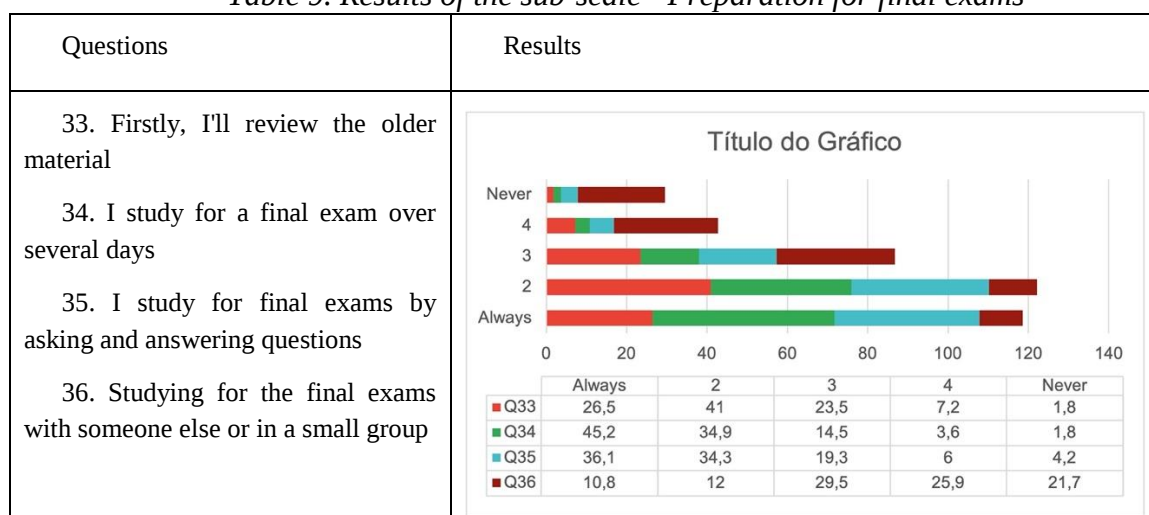
Table 8 - Results of the Notes subscale



Source: own (2024)

For final exam preparation, students highlight studying over several days, though they don't always start with older materials. There's also a notable absence of group study.

Table 9. Results of the sub-scale - Preparation for final exams



Source: own (2024)

4. Discussion

In online higher education, students are expected to take an active role in their own learning process. For this to be more effective, it is essential that students understand their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their learning strategies, to engage more efficiently and with greater motivation throughout the process. According to Rufini (2008), it is possible to support students in becoming active learners by teaching them how to study and learning strategies. The author defines study and learning strategies as “integrated sequences of procedures or activities that individuals choose with the purpose of facilitating the acquisition, storage, and/or use of information” (p.3). Using these strategies appropriately promotes both motivation and learning. They are valuable for guiding and controlling learning in various contexts. Teaching learning strategies helps students monitor and reflect on their own learning processes. Study strategies play an effective role in facilitating learning and promoting self-regulation in study.

Our results show that our students have a high level of motivation for learning. Coupled with their ability to set goals and establish targets, this suggests a group of students who value their learning, know how to set realistic goals, and understand how to apply their knowledge. The communication strategy was the area in which participants showed the lowest performance, consistent with the item “Studying for final exams with someone else or in a small group,” which received the lowest score. Responses across different subscales are corroborated by their similar values. Summarising, taking notes on key points, and highlighting relevant information align with a planned, time-managed approach to exam preparation.

This group of students appears to be aware of their strategies and uses them to achieve their goals, thereby adding meaning to their learning. In online education, it is crucial for teachers to assist with the planning and to understand study strategies, to help enhance the most effective learning methods and, in turn, to ensure success.

For future research, it is important to share these results with students and work with them on their strengths and areas for improvement to help them take advantage of this self-awareness in their study and learning tasks. As mentioned previously, this can increase the likelihood of students self-regulating their learning.

5. Conclusion

Mastering effective study strategies not only improves academic performance but also fosters students' self-confidence and self-efficacy. By realising they can study effectively and achieve their academic goals, students develop a more positive attitude towards learning and their potential. In summary, study strategies are essential tools for any student's learning toolkit. They empower students to face academic challenges with confidence, efficiency, and success, preparing them not only to achieve immediate educational goals but also to thrive in future careers and academic pursuits.

Study strategies play an even more critical role in online education, where students face additional challenges related to self-discipline, time management, and reduced interaction with instructors and peers. In this educational system, teachers are responsible for equipping students with tools that encourage them to reflect on their learning tasks, making their processes more conscious and, if necessary, adjusting them.

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