
The Impact of Study Support

A study into the effects of participation in out-of-school-hours learning on the academic attainment, attitudes and attendance of secondary school students

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Background

This report describes the findings from a three-year longitudinal evaluation - the *Study Support National Evaluation and Development Programme (SSNEDP)* - on the impact of participation in study support (out of school hours learning) on the academic attainment, attitudes and school attendance of secondary school students. The programme was set up by the Department for Education and Skills (formerly the Department for Education and Employment) and the Prince's Trust in Autumn 1997, having grown out of a research consortium of the Prince's Trust, Tower Hamlets and Sandwell local education authorities, and the Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council. In 1999, the Prince's Trust transferred management of the programme to the National Youth Agency.

Key Findings

The research found firm evidence in all the schools studied that:

- pupils who participate in study support do better than would have been predicted from baseline measures, in academic attainment, attitudes to school and attendance at school than students who do not participate;
- the effects are large, an average of three and half grades or one more A-C pass at GCSE;
- study support appears especially effective for students from minority ethnic communities and, to a lesser extent, for students eligible for free school meals.

Background

Study support is defined as learning activity, undertaken voluntarily by students out of school hours. It is designed to raise motivation, self esteem and achievement. (DfEE 1998) Significant funding and other forms of support has been made available since 1998 to schools, libraries, sports, arts youth and other organisations to extend and enhance opportunities for out of school hours learning.

Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken by the Quality in Education Centre at the University of Strathclyde between autumn 1997 and summer 2000. It tracked two cohorts, totalling over 8,000 pupils, from 52 schools (44 in England, six in Wales and two in Scotland); the larger cohort was tracked from Year 9 through to their GCSEs and the smaller cohort from Year 7 through to their KS3 SATs. Baseline data was collected on individual students of background information, such as age, gender and ethnicity, and of measures of academic attainment, attitudes and school attendance. Similar outcome measures were gathered and linked to data on the participation of the individual students in various types of study support. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify the factors influencing the outcomes, in particular the effects of study support. Qualitative research to support the main statistical data was undertaken by The National Foundation for Educational Research with Create Consultants in the form of case studies of 12 schools, and by the Critical Friends attached to the *National Evaluation and Development Programme*, who interviewed staff and students in 25 schools.

The impact of study support on attainment

The study found, in common with many previous studies, (Mortimer 1988, 1989; Rutter, 1979) that prior academic attainment provides the strongest predictor of results in academic tests. Gender, ethnicity and school attended also make a significant difference to examination results. Allowing for these factors we found in all the schools studied that study support has effects which were significant and substantial for academic performance.

Students who participate scored on average three and a half grades on Best 5 or one more A-C pass than students of equal ability who do not participate.

Study support improved attainment in Maths and English GCSE by half a grade.

Study Support has significant effects on KS3 SATs scores. Participation improves Maths attainment by a third of a level and Science attainment by three-quarters of a level.

Forms of study support that have an effect

By classifying the study support activities that each of the schools in the study provided into taxonomy,

we were able to identify what broad categories of activity had significant impact on academic attainment.

Study support related to curriculum subjects shows strong effect on GCSE results but so also do sport, aesthetic activities and drop-in sessions as well as other activities such as hobby clubs and peer education programmes. Subject-focussed activities in Yr.10, Easter revision courses in Yr.11 had the largest and most consistent impact on GCSE results.

On KS3 SATs we found that Study Skills in Yr.8 and Subject focussed provision in Yr.9 impact on Science and Maths results. The findings for impact on English were not statistically significant

Who benefits most?

All students who participate in study support get benefit from it; girls and boys to roughly the same extent. Students eligible for free school meals benefit slightly more.

Students from minority ethnic groups benefit significantly more. But there are important interlinked effects between ethnicity and gender. We found that white girls and African/African Caribbean boys and girls broadly benefited to the same extent as the mean for the whole sample. Girls who identified as of Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian ethnicity benefited very much more, about four GCSE grades, than the whole sample and boys from the same groups did slightly better. White boys did worse, by about one grade, than the mean for the whole sample.

The impact of study support on student attitudes

Students' attitude were measured using the inventory, *You and your school*, (NFER 1993) Students' attitudes declined over the three years, as has been found with previous studies.(Thomas et al 1998; MacBeath and Mortimer 2001). Participation in study support lessened the rate of decline so that those who did participate had more positive attitudes than students who had started from a similar baseline who did not participate.

In Yr.10 it is study skills and drop-in provision, aesthetic and other activities which have an impact on attitudes. Whereas in Yr.11, although sport and aesthetic activities have an effect, that of subject focussed provision is much stronger. Participation in Year 11 has a stronger impact on attitudes than participation in Yr.10

The impact on attendance

Yr. 9 attendance patterns and school attended proved to be the best predictors of attendance at Yr.11. But participation in Subject-focussed study support and Drop in provision in Yr. 11 were highly correlated with improved patterns of attendance across all the schools. There were effects from Yr.10 provision but only in some schools

Participation Rates

There were no significant differences in overall rates of participation in study support between boys and girls though boys do more sport and girls do more aesthetic activities. Ethnicity and eligibility for free school meals are not significant factors in participation.

The best predictor of likelihood of participation is the school attended. Schools vary in what they provide and in how successful they are at encouraging students to attend. We found that participation rates varied very widely: in Yr.11 for Subject-focussed provision between 98% and 26%, for Sport between 78% and 8% and for Aesthetic activities between 62% and 6%. We also found that prior attendance at study support increased the likelihood of subsequent participation.

Why does study support have an effect

Leisure activities such as hobby clubs, sport and music and drama have an impact on academic attainment as well as on attitudes and attendance. Conversely homework clubs, revision classes and holiday schools affect attitudes and attendance as well as attainment. From these findings, and qualitative data, we conclude that over and above the direct effects of revision classes, homework clubs or sports and aesthetic activities all types of study support have significant indirect effects influencing motivation and self-esteem. There are also cumulative effects: participation study support activities in year X has effects which are measurable in year X+1. We therefore infer that indirect and cumulative effects are contributing to the impact of study support.

From discussion with staff and students the single factor that emerged most consistently was the voluntary nature of study support. Students like choosing to go. The evidence, both from case studies and the authentic voice interviews, reinforces findings from other studies (MacBeath, 1991, 1992, Sharp, 1999); Study supports benefits participants because:

- It is voluntary - for students and staff
- It is learner-centred
- Students and teachers experience a greater sense of control
- There is a more relaxed and informal relationship between teachers and students
- It provides a sociable learning environment
- It fosters independent self-regulated learning
- There is access to a range of resources for learning
- There is an ethos of achievement.

We can also identify elements that were not present in all the schools in this study but did serve to strengthen study support's effectiveness:

- Study support is seen as having a vital part to play in a whole school approach to raising achievement
- It has the active support of the head teacher and/or senior management
- The study support coordinator plays a proactive role in the development and monitoring of provision
- The study support coordinator is a member of senior management
- Students play a part in shaping and evaluating the study support programme
- There is external support from the LEA, critical friends or others
- There are student mentors who receive support and/or training in carrying out their role

Students become more self-regulated learners. Once a critical mass is reached this has an impact on the ethos of the school

Conclusions and recommendation

We conclude that the findings of this study are educationally highly significant. The effectiveness of study support derives not just from more time spent in study and closer support from staff but from the ethos and consequent engagement of students. Study support can help improve schools and can influence the attitudes to learning of teachers and parents as well as students.

We make recommendations about the involvement of

students and about the way schools should plan evaluate and manage provision, laying emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation. We further recommend that study support should be seen as an element of all initiatives to raise achievement and promote social inclusion. Professional development of staff, co-ordinated planning and assured long-term funding are therefore necessary.

References

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Copies of the full report (RR273) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

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