

TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING STRATEGIES IN A MEDICAL SCHOOL CONTEXT

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Development of an advanced, deep level learning in students is an important purpose of tertiary education. Since the objective of present day curriculum reform is basically to improve the quality of learning processes that students realize, the emphasis is on how the students should learn as well as on what they should learn (the content). Therefore, among researchers, the attention for the quality of learning processes has grown as well. However, Longitudinal, within-subject studies to examine intra-individual changes of the learning strategies are scarce. Furthermore, similar studies have not been reported within a medical school context in Sri Lanka.

The present study aimed to broaden the understanding of the learning process of the medical students in a traditional curriculum. This involves the extent to which students report change, the degree of stability and variability of learning strategies, mental models of learning and learning orientations during the course of studies.

Participants were 144 students (82%) from the 1999/2000 batch and 92 students (61%) from 1996/1997 batch of medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Adapted version of the Inventory of Learning Styles called the "Adyayana Rata Prakasha Malawa (ARPM)" was used as the test instrument. The inventory (ARPM) measured learning strategies, learning orientations and mental learning models of students. This study has a within-subject longitudinal design. ARPM was administered prior to the commencement of the academic course proper and towards the end of the third term of the Second MBBS course in the case of 1999/2000 batch of students. For the 1996/1997 batch, the same inventory was administered during the first term of Third MBBS part I course and then towards the end of the Third term in the Third MBBS part II course. In the respective batches, only those who completed both inventories were included in the study. Paired samples T-test was used to analyse the changes between variables within each batch.

Results showed that both batches of students had reported the use of stepwise processing strategies (memorising and analyzing strategies) less frequently. Within the regulation domain, self-regulation of learning was reported significantly less during the course of studies by both batches of students. The other similarity observed in the two groups of students was the decrease in personal interest in the course of time. However, analysis did not reveal more frequent use of constructive learning strategies such as critical processing and concrete processing in the course of time.

It is recommended that these findings, specially the fact that there is no increase in the use of constructive learning strategies and self-regulation strategies, be given special attention during curriculum development.