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Evaluating the Study Guide as a Tool for Increasing Students' Accountability for Reading the Textbook

A successful lecture that includes meaningful class discussions requires students to be familiar with the topics covered in the assigned reading. However, because college students frequently do not complete such reading prior to class, instructors are faced with the challenge of finding methods that would encourage students to do so. The purpose of this study was to evaluate one method, a study guide, of holding students accountable for the reading. Forty-one students in two social work courses participated in this qualitative research. Students overall had a positive response to the study guide assignment and reported that it was a helpful tool to increase their reading of the textbook throughout the semester.
Key words: textbook reading, assignments, higher-education, student accountability, study guide

It is generally accepted that textbook reading enhances students' understanding of course material and that the more a student reads, the greater his/her facility with the content will be (Ryan, 2006). Recognizing the importance of textbook reading, many professors urge their students to read assigned textbook material before class because they feel that students familiar with the presented

material are more likely to contribute to class discussions. Given that lecture time is generally too short to cover content thoroughly and that time constraints often hamper the inclusion of useful supplemental activities, such as role plays and guest experts, students' guided reading before class can facilitate effective lectures and result in positive learning outcomes.

Students also recognize the importance that textbooks hold in their learning. Besser, Stone, and Nan (1999) studied college students' perceptions of their textbooks. They learned that students do recognize that textbooks are "an integral part of the course learning experience" (p.15). Additionally, students associate helpful textbooks with helpful classes and vice versa. However, as the literature demonstrates, more often than not, students do not read the assigned material before coming to class. Professors are then left with the dilemma of finding the best methods to motivate students (Philips, 1995; Ryan, 2006; Sikorski, Rich, Saville, Buskist, Drogan, & Davis, 2002; Solomon, 1979).

The purpose of this particular study was to evaluate one method of using a study guide to hold students accountable for the reading of textbook assignments prior to attending class. The study also explored students' opinions about how professors can encourage students to read the assigned chapters and other material before class time. Studies on the use of textbooks by college students are scarce. Such research in social work education does not exist, so this study addresses this gap in the knowledge base for social work. Exploring students' suggestions as to the best means an instructor can use to increase textbook reading ahead of class is an additional contribution of this research.

Literature Review

According to the literature, the majority of students either do not consult textbooks or they use them infrequently (Sikorski et al., 2002). For example, Podolefsky and Finkelstein (2006) investigated their physics students' use of textbooks. They reported that 97% of students purchased the required text, less than 41% regularly read the book before lectures, and 60% read *after* the lecture. They also reported that some students were under the impression that course content could be grasped simply by coming to class. Some may read the textbook word-for-word while others use it as a reference to complete assignments. Some students may use the textbook only for exam preparation. Students are influenced by their perception of what will work for them and by time constraints. What is clear from the research is that students use textbooks differently (Podolefsky & Finkelstein, 2006). Podolefsky's and Finkelstein's (2006) findings match those of Sikorski and his colleagues (2002) who studied

patterns of purchase and use of textbooks among introductory psychology students at two universities. These researchers found that although most students purchased the required textbooks, they used them infrequently. Students perceived that studying class notes and attending lectures "were more important than reading the text for receiving a good grade" (Sikorski et al., 2002, p. 312). As educators realized that there was a disconnect between educators' expectations and students' compliance in reading the textbooks, they attempted to use different methods to increase students' motivation for reading the assigned material prior to coming to class (Howard, 2004). Educators stressed that accepting non-effort by students is not productive for students' learning nor is it good for the culture at large (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000).

The articles on textbook use divide into two major groups. One focuses on the "how to," namely, suggestions for solving this problem, yet they do not follow with evaluating the suggested applications (e.g., Burchfield & Sappington, 2002; Podolefsky & Finkelstein, 2006; Sikorski et al. 2002). The other group of publications (Diamantes, 2007; Dickson, Miller & Devoley, 2005; Henderson & Rosenthal, 2006; Howard, 2004; Philips, 1995; Ryan, 2006; Solomon, 1979) is research-based and provides an evaluation of an applied model. However, such publications are scarce, and little research exists on students' regular use of textbooks. Manuscripts describing students' perceptions of a method that was applied as well as their suggestions for increasing students' use of textbook reading do not exist.

The following section provides an overview of methods used to encourage students to read their textbooks, followed by an evaluation of the results of their application.

Summary of Research on Methods used to Encourage Students to Read the Textbook

Solomon (1979) examined the effectiveness of the "two-point system" in motivating students in a psychology course to read the assigned material. The "two-point system" is a voluntary reading system that "rewards students who have read the material and has no consequences for those who have not" (p. 77). To receive credit, students had to select a few important points from the readings and indicate how these points related to the topic about to be discussed in class, or to topics previously covered. For each successful critique, students received two points on their next exam. This system was used six to nine times a semester on a random basis and involved a comparison between two groups: an experimental group that used this system and a control group that did not. The data from this study indicated that the two-point system proved

to be a successful method in encouraging 85% of the students to read the assigned material before coming to class. While there was no difference in the final exam scores between the two-point group and the comparison group, the class discussions in the two-point group were superior and the students preferred this method of accountability to quizzes.

Philips (1995) used test scores to compare students' use of biology textbooks. In this method, he employed "open-book questions" during exams. These questions were "related to the lectures but cannot be answered from the lecture notes" (p. 484). Students were encouraged to use any method that helped them prepare for the course exams, such as making tabs for their books, highlighting important ideas, and making notes in the margins in order to facilitate finding their answers quickly. The open book portion of the exam lasted for 15 minutes with the remainder of the session devoted to more conventional testing methods. Phillips found that his students' test scores improved, which he attributed to their learning how to use their textbooks more effectively. And as Phillips further noted, this system allowed him "to include additional information in the class because the students are being held accountable for reading" (p. 484). No information was given about the number of times the students were tested during the semester or how the open-book exam affected students' reading the textbook before attending lectures.

Using one section of an introductory psychology course as an experimental group and another section as a control group, Dickson, Miller, and Devoley (2005) studied the effects of required textbook study guides on students' performance on a multiple-choice exam. The researchers found that those students who completed at least a portion of the study guide performed significantly better than students in the control group; however, students who completed 75% or more of the study guide did not perform significantly better than students who completed 25% or less. Dickson and his colleagues concluded that the results "offer support for the effectiveness of study guides in courses that use multiple-choice exams; however, more exercises may not enhance performance" (p. 34). Moreover, students who used the study guide had a positive perception of its usefulness and would voluntarily use one in the future.

Ryan (2006) examined the impact of three different strategies used to motivate students to read their psychology textbooks and come prepared to class. These strategies included (a) use of general global assignments (e.g., read chapter 15) with planned quizzes, (b) use of focused, explicit homework assignments with minimal teacher comments, and (c) use of focused, explicit assignments with extensive teacher comments (p. 136). As a result of comparing the three groups' midterm and final

exams, Ryan concluded that the use of "focused, explicit homework assignments with extensive teacher feedback on the assignments was the most effective strategy" (p. 136).

Educators also experimented with using technology to encourage the use of textbooks. For example, Howard (2004) used a specially developed Web technology (similar to Blackboard or WebCT) to administer a two-question quiz for each section with responses due two hours before class. Responses were graded and used as class discussion points. Howard concluded that this technique increased the percentage of students who read the textbook to 98%, a 30-point increase.

Henderson and Rosenthal (2006) used e-mail to require students to submit a "reading question" based on the assigned reading and due before class (p. 46). The students were expected to describe a difficulty they had with understanding aspects of the readings and ask a question about it. Henderson and Rosenthal concluded that, as a result of using this technique, their students increased reading and had significantly higher outcomes than students at other universities on a standardized assessment tool. The researchers credit the reading questions with this difference.

Diamantes (2007) used WebCT to get his graduate students in educational administration to read more purposefully. He found that requiring students to write chapter summaries along with personal reflections at the end of each week forced them to read, helped them connect the academic content to their own experience, and facilitated more personal communication between professor and students.

Summary of the Literature

The literature mentioned above described the various techniques that professors from different disciplines have used. What these results have in common is that when instructors apply a system that encourages students to read, students respond positively. There was a correspondence between increased regular reading and improved grades. These studies also showed that when students are held accountable, they read. These results correspond positively with the self-efficacy theory. As stressed by the self-efficacy theory, improved grades may lead to efficacious behaviors related to the use of textbooks because "successes raise efficacy," which in turn increases students' motivation to perform well (Schunk, 1991, p. 208).

However, these studies used only midterm and final grades as a measure for evaluating the success of their methods. These researchers did not explore students' perceptions of the methods they used. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap. This study used qualitative

research methodology to explore students' perceptions of the study guide homework assignment as a means for holding students' accountable for reading the textbook.

Study Methods

Sample and Data Collection

Students from a mid-size public university in Virginia who were enrolled in two undergraduate social work courses (practice and research) that were taught by one of the researchers participated in this exploratory study (N = 41). The practice and research courses are required courses for students wishing to graduate with a baccalaureate degree in social work. However, while the practice course is limited to students majoring in social work, the research course is open to students outside this major. Social work practice classes at a generalist level focus on promoting "human and social well-being" (Council on Social Work Education Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, p. 7), and students are taught a variety of methods to intervene at the individual, family, group, organization, and community levels. In the research course, students are taught to critically reflect on research findings in order to make use of evidence-based practice methods.

The university's Institutional Review Board reviewed the study and gave its approval. Students were asked to read and sign an informed consent form, and to complete a questionnaire on demographic data. They were provided with six closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The students filled out the questionnaires anonymously in the first 10 to 15 minutes of one of the classes, close to the end of the semester. The students were questioned about their gender, level of education, and GPA as well as about other commitments that might affect the time available for reading the textbook (e.g., employment, volunteering). To protect confidentiality and avoid bias, the instructor was absent from class while the students worked on the questionnaire; a student assistant distributed and collected the completed forms.

The six closed-ended questions were intended to track the students' use of textbooks and their study habits. Examples included items such as "my best learning style is…," "I buy most (few, or none) of the required textbooks," "I get most of my knowledge taught in the course from PowerPoint, lecture readings," "I use the textbook frequently (always, seldom)," and "the main purpose for which I read the textbook is to prepare for exams (exams, homework, prepare for class, expand knowledge)."

The first of the two open-ended questions assessed students' reactions to the study guides and the contribution to their learning. A second

question solicited students' suggestions as to how professors can encourage students to complete the assigned readings on time.

The Study Guides

The study guides (SG) were composed of a set of questions based on the readings that had to be completed in writing prior to class. Over the course of the semester, there were seven SG assignments that were worth two points each on a 100-point scale for the course. The SG assignments totaled 14% of the final grade, and one additional point was possible for outstanding work on the SG. Some of the questions—such as, "provide a short statement that describes your understanding of what is qualitative research and what is quantitative research" required straight-forward summaries of the reading. Others required more thoughtful engagement—for example, "Can social work research answer any question?" From the practice methods course, where students are trained to use interviewing methods and problem solving techniques, examples included, "What is the 'strengths perspective?'" and "While developing Jon and Jane's case, make a connection between the 'person in environment perspective' and the 'strengths perspective.'" The assignments were graded and returned within the same week they were submitted. When it became clear that a few students were having difficulty understanding a particular concept on an SG assignment, more time was spent reviewing that concept in the next class. Repetition was used to increase understanding.

Methods of Data Analysis

SPSS statistical package was used to obtain descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations to determine students' use of textbooks and study habits.

Next, qualitative data analysis was used. Such analysis is instrumental in capturing the richness and depth of information in the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodwell, 1998). By listening to students' experiences, educators can gain insight into students' learning preferences. Students' responses were analyzed through open coding inductive analysis of the qualitative data. Transcripts were reviewed several times before they were unitized, coded, and analyzed for themes that were included in each of the two questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodwell, 1998). Units were defined by reducing data to minimal bits of meaning, with one unit representing only one concept or idea. They were reviewed for similarities and differences in ideas and sorted into categories (e.g., increased academic success) and sub-categories (e.g., focusing the readings, prepare for exams, provide structure). Categories that did not contain rich thematic data were discarded (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Results

Descriptions of Study Participants—Characteristics and Time Commitments

Forty-one students, all of whom were social work majors, participated in this study. As can be seen in Table 1, these undergraduates (ages 19-21) were predominantly female and white. They were roughly split between sophomore, junior, and senior years, with more than 40% working more than ten hours a week and more than 40% taking less than a full semester load. But 59% had a GPA of more than or equal to 3.0 overall, and 67% had a GPA of at least 3.2 in the major. Finally, a large majority of these students saw textbooks as expensive but purchased them anyway. These students worked hard to get through school.

Descriptions of Study Participants—Best Learning Styles and Preferred Methods of Pedagogy

Other data involved students' best learning styles and preferred methods of pedagogy. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of students felt that they learned best when they saw the text (61%, n = 25); only 17% learned better by hearing (visual learners versus audio learners). However, when asked how they got most of the information taught in the course, they indicated that they learned most while listening to the instructor's lectures and seeing a PowerPoint presentation at the same time (85.4%, n = 35) (seeing and hearing simultaneously). Slightly more than half of the students also indicated that, in addition to what they learn in class, they also learned from reading the textbooks (53.7%, n = 22). Writing (e.g., taking notes, summarizing, working on assignments) was almost equally divided among those students who preferred writing as a mode of learning and those who did not, with a slightly higher percentage of students who preferred to not write at all. Memorization of course material was rarely used amongst respondents. Interestingly, for most of the students in this sample, internet use was not a preferred mode of obtaining knowledge.

Surprisingly, the majority of the students indicated that they either frequently (n = 51.2%, n = 21) or always (14.6%, n = 6) used their textbooks. However, they overwhelmingly indicated that they mainly used their textbooks to learn for exams (85.4%, n = 35) and prepare homework assignments (78%, n=32). More than half of them indicated that they *did not* use textbooks to prepare for class (61%, n = 25), and an overwhelming number of students indicated that they did not read textbooks to expand their knowledge on class material (95.2%, n = 39).

Table 1
Study Participants—Characteristics and Time Commitments

		N	Percentage
Gender	Male	3	7.3
	Female	38	92.7
Race	Caucasian	33	80.5
	African American	5	12.2
	Asian	3	7.3
Educational Level	Seniors	16	39.0
	Juniors	7	17.1
	Sophomores	18	43.9
Employment	Not employed	19	46.3
	$\leq$ 10 hr/week	4	9.8
	11-20 hr/week	9	22.0
	$\geq$ 21 hr/week	9	21.9
Semester Credit Hours			
	< 15	17	42.5
	$\geq$ 15	23	55.1
	missing	1	2.4
GPA Cumulative			
	< 3.0	14	35.9
	$\geq$ 3.0	25	59.2
	missing	2	4.9
GPA Major			
	< 3.0	2	6.7
	$\geq$ 3.2	28	66.5
	missing	11	26.8
Textbook	Too Expensive	35	85.4
	Moderately Expensive	6	14.6
Purchase of Textbooks			
	All or Most	38	92.7
	Very Few	2	4.9
	When Recommended	1	2.4

Table 2
Students' preferences for style of learning and means of gaining knowledge taught in class

		N	Percentage
Preferred Learning Style			
By Hearing	Yes	7	17.1
	No	34	82.9
By Reading	Yes	25	61.0
	No	16	39.0
By Writing	Yes	18	43.9
	No	23	56.1
By Memorizing	Yes	6	14.6
	No	35	85.4
Get Most Information Taught in Course By			
Internet	Yes	11	26.8
	No	30	73.2
Listening in Class	Yes	35	85.6
	No	6	14.6
Power Point	Yes	35	85.4
	No	6	14.6
Reading the Textbook	Yes	22	53.7
	No	19	46.3
Main Purpose for Using Textbook			
Prepare for Exams	Yes	35	85.4
	No	6	14.6
Prepare Homework	Yes	32	78.0
	No	9	22.0
Prepare for Class	Yes	16	39.0
	No	25	61.0
Expand Course Knowledge & General Interest	Yes	2	4.8
	No	39	95.2
Frequency of Using Textbook			
Always		6	14.6
Frequently		21	51.2
Seldom		12	29.3
When required for class		2	4.8

Students' Reactions to the Study Guides and Their Contribution to Learning

Analysis of the qualitative data compiled from the transcripts revealed two major themes. For the most part, students reacted positively to the study guides and stated that the guides contributed to an increase in their academic success. Respondents found that the questions kept them on track by focusing their reading on the important ideas in the chapters. Participants also acknowledged the utility of the study guides in continuous reading of class material. However, a small number of students expressed frustration at being forced to do the assignments. These students preferred a different assignment that would be more congruent with their learning style or no assignment. The following descriptions and narratives were grouped according to themes and illustrate students' reactions.

Increased Academic Success

The study guides helped me focus the readings and identify the important ideas in the chapters

By far, most of the students felt that the study guides helped them focus their reading strategy, locate the important information in each chapter, and improve the overall quality of their learning. For example, one student in the practice course wrote the following:

> "I think [the study guides] are very good, they help me focus on main ideas in the chapters which tend to be long. I definitely would continue them."

A student in the research class who also found it hard to read the textbook had a similar reaction:

> "The study guides help me to properly focus, help me pick out important aspects and show me what to expect. It makes the readings less overwhelming."

One of the students in the practice course stated:

> "I like working on the study guides because I tend to read the material more often and more thoroughly and then normally understand the readings better. This is really helpful for me during the exams time."

And yet another student in the research class who benefited from using the study guides made the following suggestions:

> "The study guide is really helpful for me. It helps me prepare better for class lectures and exams. I feel it is helping in making me read and comprehend main parts of the chapter. I would like to continue with the study guide but maybe you could list key words or ideas for students to read and understand."

The guides made me read continuously rather than just before exam time

Students also felt that working regularly with the study guides allowed them to pace the readings throughout the semester rather than waiting until just before the exam. They felt that regular reading resulted in improved results in exams. For example, one student in the research course wrote the following:

> "I never read the book, this (the study guides) makes me, which helps when it comes time to study for exams."

A classmate echoed similar sentiments:

> "The study guides really encouraged me to read and immerse myself in the text. If it weren't for them my books would then only get used the night before examinations."

Students also found that the study guides provided them with a viable strategy for out-of-class work and helped them organize their schedules more efficiently. A student in the research course wrote the following:

> "It [the study guides] is very helpful to me. It keeps me on track and allows me to plan my schedule."

And a student in the practice course reinforced the same idea, writing:

> "The study guides are useful to me because they require me to read the book. I need this kind of structure so I know what I have to read."

Waste of time

Not all students, especially some in the research course, were positive about the use of the study guides. They resented the assignment of the guides and felt a certain degree of coercion. They were frustrated because they could have done work in their own preferred mode of study.

For example, a student in the research course wrote:

> "No, the study guides are not useful to me because most of the time I do not understand what I am doing until after you explain them in class. I feel as if in general they are busy work and I can learn the information on my own."

And another student who felt frustrated about having to write wrote the following:

> "No, I did not like the study guides and I did not find them helpful. I feel that I would read anyway and that it just takes extra time that I do not have."

Another student from the same course wrote:

> "No, the study guides were not helpful for me. I learn better from hearing and discussing material, not reading it."

Students' Suggestions as to How Professors Can Encourage Reading Prior to Coming to Class

Three main groups of ideas were generated by students when asked for their suggestions on how professors can encourage students to read the assigned material before coming to class. These included instituting regular homework assignments by the professors, leaving it up to the student's discretion, and giving quizzes on the reading or class content.

Professors can encourage by assigning homework on a regular basis

One student wrote the following about homework:

> "The most reading I've ever done was in high school because of homework assignments. College textbooks are so monotonous and lengthy. I need something to motivate me to read. Homework is something that would have helped more about college."

Another student who also believed that assigned homework was a good strategy wrote:

> "Assign homework, but not so much. If you have 5 courses with 50 pages of reading a night that is 250 pages with everything else – it's just too much. But if it was 10 pages a night it would be easier."

Students choose to read or not to read—There is not much professors can do

Those students who were frustrated with the study guides assignments supported the idea of letting students take charge of their own learning. For example, as one student noted:

> "I do not believe that professors can really encourage students. It is college and it is up to student to read or do whatever is necessary to get the grade or understanding that they want to."

However, even some of those students who believed in personal responsibility and accountability felt that the professor has a role to play in their reading. The following three comments are good examples of their thinking:

> "I personally don't think professors need to encourage students to read. It is our job to read and learn. However, they can assist us by providing key terms or concepts to focus on the reading."
>
> "They can highlight important sections to read."
>
> "Minimize the amount of pages per class meeting required."

Professors should give quizzes

There were students who believed that quizzes enhanced and strengthened their overall learning experience. Most of their responses were

stated in two or three words such as "give quizzes" and "give pop quizzes." The few students who elaborated somewhat on their responses wrote:

> "Unannounced quizzes encourage students to read because if they don't read it affects their grade."
>
> "By providing frequent quizzes and forced participation. Embarrassment and failing grades are strong motivations."

And finally, this last comment speaks for itself:

> "If professors want students to read, there has to be homework or a quiz attached to the reading. Otherwise college students tend to push the reading back and do it later because they always can find 'more important' things to do."

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to evaluate the utility of a graded homework assignment, a study guide, *from the perspective of the student* as a method to hold students accountable for reading the textbook prior to attending class. A qualitative survey explored the students' experience with the method, and the data analysis revealed that students reported increased purposeful reading of the textbooks in both classes that were involved in the study. The majority of the students shared their appreciation for the study guides, reporting that they kept them focused on the readings, helped them identify the important concepts, and compelled them to read more regularly. Most students reported that a method such as the study guides or quizzes would increase ongoing reading. The majority of the students needed help in structuring their readings, so they were actually positive about the study guides assignments.

While the larger group of students appreciated the extra structure the study guide gave them, the smaller group of more confident students reported frustration with the assignments. They valued their autonomy. They believed in their ability to structure their own time and to effectively use their preferred learning styles and study methods. This smaller group of students believed in their competence to learn, and they were vocal about it. Indeed, the feelings of frustration were clear when a few students characterized the preparation guide as "busy work" and a "waste of time." These same sentiments were echoed in the second open-ended question. When students were asked how professors can encourage students to read the assigned reading, about a third of the participants preferred to leave it up to the students' discretion.

Overall the results of this study confirm the results of existing studies done in other disciplines. All agree that holding students accountable for reading their textbooks before coming to class is important

(Dickson, Miller, & Devoley, 2005; Philips, 1995; Ryan, 2006; Solomon, 1979). However, in spite of being a pilot-like study, this research differs from the others. Rather than relying solely on grades to measure students' learning experiences, this study uses qualitative methodology to reach these conclusions. By focusing on students' impressions of one technique used to encourage the reading of the textbooks, this study provides useful insights on the perplexing problem of how to motivate students to read their textbooks before arriving in class. The open-ended, qualitative nature of the research method employed in this study was instrumental in capturing a multitude of student opinions and enriched our understanding of the process of student learning. For example, the responses demonstrated enthusiasm for a method that allowed students to read more purposefully and regularly. The merits of consistency and structured reading support Linderholm's (2006) idea that reading with purpose is instrumental in motivating students to read. Learning theories discuss academic motivation in terms of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997) and within related constructs such as perceived control, outcome expectations, perceived value of outcomes, attributions, self-concept (Schunk, 1991) and self-regulated learning (Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008). Self-efficacy refers to the "beliefs that individuals have about their capabilities to complete a particular task successfully" and has "consistently been shown to be positively associated with general academic achievement" (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008, p. 514). Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, those who have a low sense of self-efficacy for accomplishing a task may avoid it, while those who believe in their efficacy tend to "work harder and persist longer" (Schunk, 1991, p. 208).

Responses also demonstrated, however, that not all students are the same and that some students were merely frustrated with the study guide assignment. Accommodating different learning styles is a core problem in education and a constant dilemma for instructors. Instructors may believe that young adults at the undergraduate level should be well prepared to be independent learners; however, that belief must be questioned when faced with the voices of the students in this study. These students were motivated to succeed, and they were aware that reading the textbooks would contribute to that success; however, they appreciated the structure and accountability that the preparation guides provided.

Implications for Teaching and Future Research

This study raised numerous questions to be examined in future research. For example, as can be seen in Table 2, students have different study habits and preferences, preferred modes for obtaining knowledge,

and underlying reasons for using their textbooks. Future research can focus on the influence of students' preferred modes of learning on test results or class discussion and whether the use of textbooks will influence instructors' presentation in the classroom.

Additionally, considering that 85% of the students prefer to obtain their knowledge by listening in class while reading the notes from a PowerPoint presentation, and that the same percentage of students use their textbooks mainly to prepare for exams, would manipulation of such preferences motivate students to read their textbooks before coming to class? For example, would requiring students to prepare PowerPoint presentations for each other on brief sections of the assigned reading impact their textbooks reading? Or perhaps a variation of the assignment, as noted by McKeachie (2002), could involve writing essays about the students' PowerPoint presentations designed to produce thoughtful, integrative responses.

Future research can also assist in further clarifying the connection between teaching methodologies and students' motivation for learning and self-efficacy. For example, taking into consideration that the majority of the students expressed such positive attitudes toward a guided learning format, perhaps the impact of a *weekly* study guide would have been even greater than reported if the guide had been used for more than the seven weeks of this study.

Finally, future research should also address some of this study's limitations, including the small sample size of predominantly Caucasian females. Although qualitative research offers the benefits of hearing the richness of peoples' voices in the data, it is nevertheless limited by its inability to be generalized across larger populations. Future research should focus on obtaining a larger representation of students across gender, race, age, and geographical locations (Sandelowski, 1993). Additionally, since this was a qualitative study, there was no control group used. Future studies using a true experimental design with a control group would be valuable assets in determining cause and effect.

This study is a first in using qualitative methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of a study guide. By listening to students' descriptions of the assignments' contribution to their educational success and concept mastery, we gain insight into what helps students be efficacious in their learning. Rich narratives gained from the data analysis contribute to our understanding of the numerical results supported by the literature and justify the use of graded homework assignments that connect students to their textbooks, prior to attending class.

Future research should continue to offer deeper insight into students' best learning methods and effective teaching methodologies. For example,

future research could show a progressive improvement in grades and knowledge acquired through use of a study guide over a semester. Future qualitative studies including a comparison group could potentially demonstrate the impact that the study guide has on either knowledge acquisition or grades. Pragmatic educators must listen to the students' voices to best support and motivate the consistent reading of the textbook.

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