

Piloting the Expert Learners Seminar Series

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1. Introduction

Students face many challenges when moving from secondary school to university and this must be addressed in part by helping students develop the learning and study skills they need to survive and prosper academically in their new environment. The Expert Learner Seminar Series (ELSS) was piloted for that reason in the first semester of the 2017-18 academic year at a globally-ranked, publically-funded university in Hong Kong. The series consisted of six, one-hour seminars. The second through fifth seminars focused on training new students, while the first and sixth seminars consisted of an introduction and conclusion to the seminar series and, respectively, pre- and post- administrations of the Learning and Studies Strategies Inventory (LASSI). In this paper, I briefly review the highlights of LASSI, before turning to the main points of the pilot seminar series and discussing the pre- and post- LASSI results of students who gave their consent for their scores to be used for research purposes.

2. LASSI Highlights

The Learning and Studies Strategies Inventory (LASSI) was developed By Weinstein, Schule and Palmer at the University of Texas at Austin. It has been refined and developed over many years and is considered to be to be a “statistically valid and reliable tool for the diagnosis of study skills” (H&H, 2017). The second edition of LASSI consists of 80 questions using a five point Likert scale to measure the following ten student learning and study strategies or methods: anxiety; attitude; concentration; information processing; motivation; self-testing; selecting main ideas; use of support techniques and materials; time management; and test preparation and taking strategies. (Ibid). The recently released third edition includes 60 questions covering the same ten domains except that the items on study aids have been replaced by a new category, “Using Academic Resources” (Ibid).

LASSI is recommended by its creators for five main uses:

“A basis for improving all student's learning and study strategies;

A diagnostic measure to help identify areas in which students could benefit most from educational interventions;

A counseling tool for college orientation programs, developmental education programs, learning assistance programs, and learning centers;

A pre-post achievement measure for students participating in programs or courses focusing on learning strategies and study skills;

An evaluation tool to assess the degree of success of intervention programs or courses.

“ (Ibid)

In the past 25 years, about 60 studies have been published on various uses or variations of LASSI (SCOPUS, retrieved November 2017) in 10 countries. From most to least, the studies have been published by researchers in

the United States; Hong Kong; Norway; Spain; Argentina; Australia; Belgium; Canada; Ethiopia; Greece; Iran, Israel, Italy; Malaysia; Pakistan; South Africa and Taiwan.

Among the most cited of these studies have been Olejnik and Nisits 1992 article examining LASSI by exploratory analysis as well as confirmatory analysis, and Koymen's 1992 finding that no affective domain differences in LASSI scores in students in both open and traditional learning systems in Turkey. Like Koymen, Corrigan and Lee (1997) also found low scores in the affective domain among university students in Hong Kong, despite their being the students with the highest GPAs in a selection of programs in the university. At the same university, Downing et al. (2011) used the LASSI in a novel way as a pre- and post- measure of metacognition in a problem-based learning application.

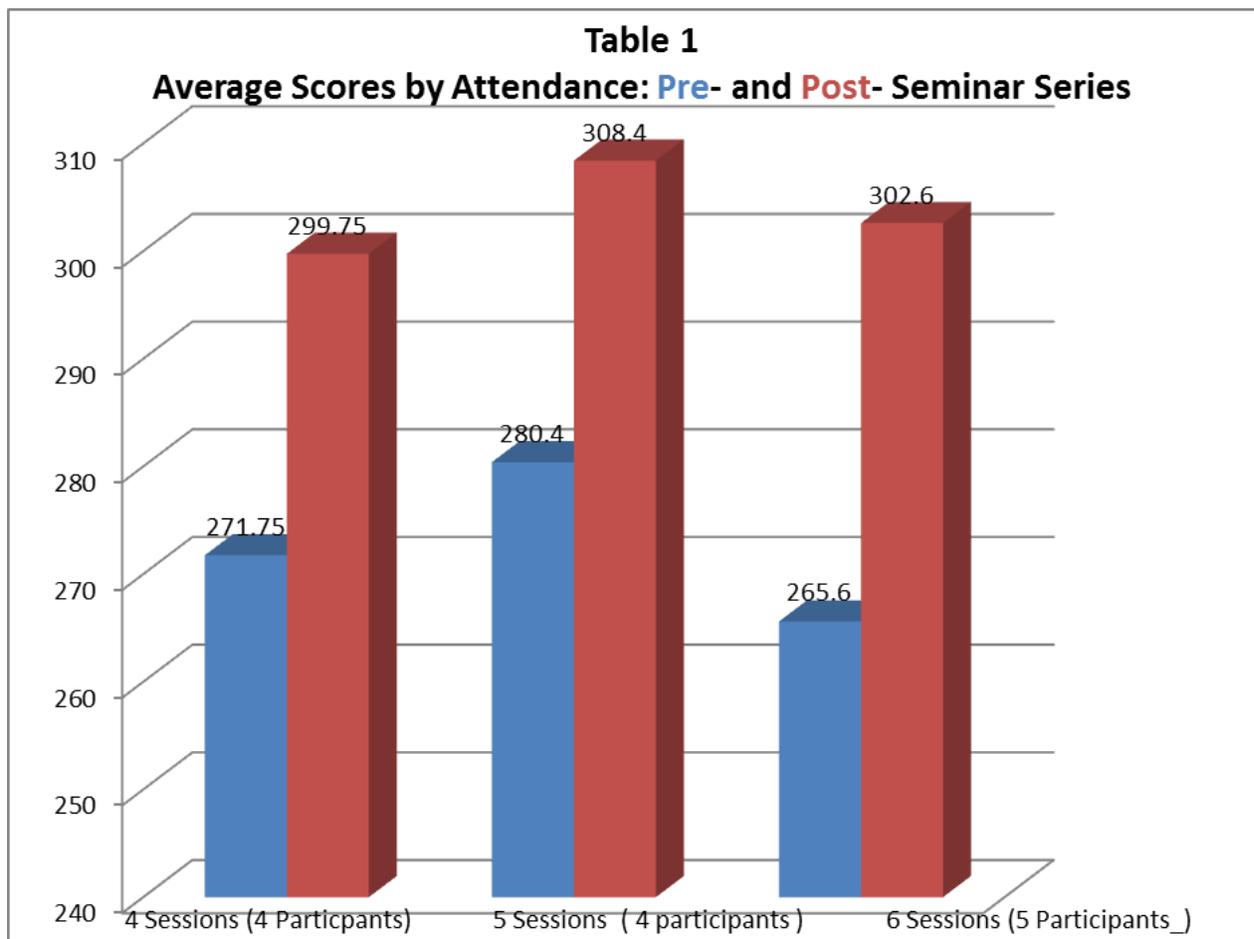
3. The Current Study

In this exploratory study, the LASSI second edition was used as a pre- and post- measure of the effect of a series of seminars designed to help new students at the university improve their learning and study strategies and methods. The seminars consisted of on-line materials presented as PowerPoint slides for the students to go over before attending the seminars and engaging in student-centered, facilitator-led discussions on the knowledge gained from the on-line materials as well as applying that knowledge in developing skills and attitudes based on them. Due to the limited time available as first year students are busy adjusting to their new environment, and especially to keep it short enough for them in order to maintain their motivation for the series, only four LASSI domains received attention in ELSSs. The four domains were selected from the results of Corrigan and Lee's 1997 study at the same university. In that study, they found that attitude, motivation, self-study, and test-taking strategies received the lowest LASSI scores; those domains were therefore the focus of the 2017 study. The seminars took the participants through these questions:

1. What is attitude, why is it important for my studies, and how can I enhance it?
2. What is motivation, why is it important for my studies, and how can I improve it?
3. What are self-testing strategies, why are they important for my studies, and how can I cultivate them?
4. What are test-taking strategies, why are they important for my studies, and how can I develop them?

In total, 31 students registered for the series and 13 gave their consent for their pre- and post- survey results to be used. Two were new students in Master's level programs and eleven were new students in undergraduate programs.

Table 1 shows the overall average pre- and post- LASSI scores and takes into account the number of sessions in which students participated. It was expected that the number of sessions attended was likely to influence scores. As is seen, post- LASSI scores increased collectively by an average of 11% over the pre-LASSI scores, i.e., after the students had completed the pilot seminars devoted to improving attitude, motivation, self-testing strategies, and test-taking strategies. In those four domains, out of a total of 42 LASSI scores (i.e., four domains multiplied by 13 students), participants' scores rose in 37 instances, remained the same in 2; and declined in 3 in from the pre-seminar LASSI to the post-seminar LASSI.



4. Conclusion

The inference that the Expert Learners Seminar Series had a strongly significant effect on the LASSI scores of participants and, by extension, on the students' improved will and skill and knowledge to adjust to the complicated academic terrain of university study, must be taken in the context of the small number of participants. Nevertheless, the results for this pilot study are encouraging.

The results study provides solid justification not just for repeating the series, but for expanding it over the coming years so that it is available to any new, first-year undergraduate student. In doing so, an ever-larger number of students should be able to more quickly adapt to university learning and studying. Such preparation is likely to make the best use not just of the students own personal and material resources but those material resources of the university as well, since students would be better prepared to make the most of what their university has to offer by taking the Expert Learner Seminar Series.

5. References

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