



A learning strategist's impact: students' perceptions of academic support

Jaclyn Tuason

St. George's University, Grenada

Presentation Abstract

In this presentation, I examine the role of a learning strategist by analysing anonymous feedback from 258 Veterinary students collected over five terms at St. George's University in Grenada. By analysing student feedback, this study contributes to evidence-based learning development and guides my practice in adopting a more flexible approach to personalised time management techniques and tailored self-testing formats, which helps maintain academic currency.

Adapting to the rigorous demands of Veterinary education requires more than subject mastery; it requires the use of evidence-based learning strategies (Reynolds, 2020). Many students struggle to develop effective learning strategies, which can hinder their academic progress (Laakkonen and Nevgi, 2014). This action research, grounded in reflective practice, seeks to explore two key questions:

1. How do Veterinary students perceive the impact of academic support from a learning strategist?
2. How can these insights drive innovation in learning strategist practices?

To address these questions, I collected anonymous feedback from 258 Veterinary students and examined open-ended responses where students could share insights and experiences between Spring 2022 and Spring 2024. Using thematic analysis within a qualitative framework, I identified three key themes: Strategy Support, Student Action, and Emotional Support. I then analysed Likert scale responses, which largely reflected positive perceptions.

This presentation will illustrate how I adapted my approaches based on student feedback, discuss the positive impact of these changes, and offer practical advice for others. By doing so, it highlights the importance of maintaining currency in learning development through continuous adjustment to student needs. The strategies I implemented, including presenting multiple options without judgment and customising time management techniques and self-testing formats, highlight creative approaches to building a supportive learning environment. These findings emphasise the value of innovation in learning development, showing how feedback driven by student input can enhance student support strategies.

Keywords: learning strategist; academic support strategies; learning strategies; evidence-based practices.

Community response

This presentation offered a rich combination of qualitative and quantitative data on how Veterinary students perceived the strategy support they received. The development of emotional support as a key theme in the study was one element very evidently presented. There is no denying that Veterinary school is extremely demanding academically, and the emotional component is as important. It was interesting to see how students not only appreciated the academic tools but also expressed feeling validated after meetings with the learning strategist. This highlights that learning support is not just about techniques like time management or self-testing but also provides a sense of psychological safety. In a high-pressure environment where many students are far from home and battling impostor syndrome, this emotional scaffolding is essential. It highlighted how becoming a self-regulated learner doesn't happen in a vacuum; it requires both cognitive skill and emotional resilience. I also appreciated the insight that the implementation of the new curriculum offers a chance to monitor students' development over time, starting from the time they enrol in the program and ending with their board exam preparation.

Community responses demonstrated how important emotional impact learning and development strategies are for the student and how they applauded the presenter for quantifying the evidence.

Response 1

I have always felt that the emotional aspect of one-to-one appointments is very important. It's not easy to make students feel safe and comfortable to discuss what is bothering them when we might be meeting them for the first time and may only have a short amount of time with them, but it is so important to what we do. It is also increasingly important to be able to justify what we do with quantifiable evidence, and your project does that without losing sight of the less tangible aspects of what we do, so thank you.

The presenter was also acknowledged for highlighting the importance of many 'hats' that are worn as learning developers. The role is not just confined to academia but also is inclusive of dealing with different students, student adaptability, and emotions.

Response 2

This data rich session perfectly reflected the many 'hats' we wear as learning developers, going beyond academic support to provide so much more. The foundational strategy concepts were useful approaches to encourage self-reflection, and I particularly liked the stoplight method as a simple way of getting highly pressured Vet students to break tasks down rationally.

Response 3

In a high-pressure environment where many students are far from home and battling impostor syndrome, this emotional scaffolding is essential.

Overall, the presenter attempted to highlight some key points specifically for the students in this study to be encouraged to stop and think about their learning more holistically, and to have their concerns and needs acknowledged. This is a beautiful example of meaningful impact. When we find a way to put the person at the heart of learning, rather than the content, we demonstrate unequivocally that learning matters and that they matter as learners.

Visuals used from presentation

Figure 1. Presenter's slide: the quantitative results from learning strategist satisfaction survey.

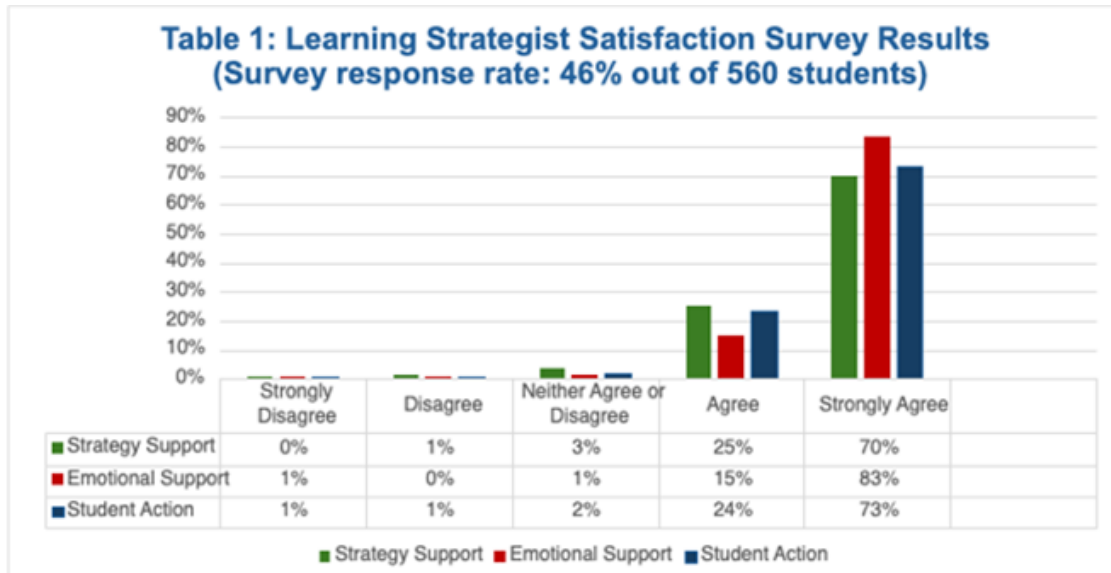


Figure 2. Presenter's slide: the three themes that emerged were: Strategy Support, Student Action and Emotional Support.

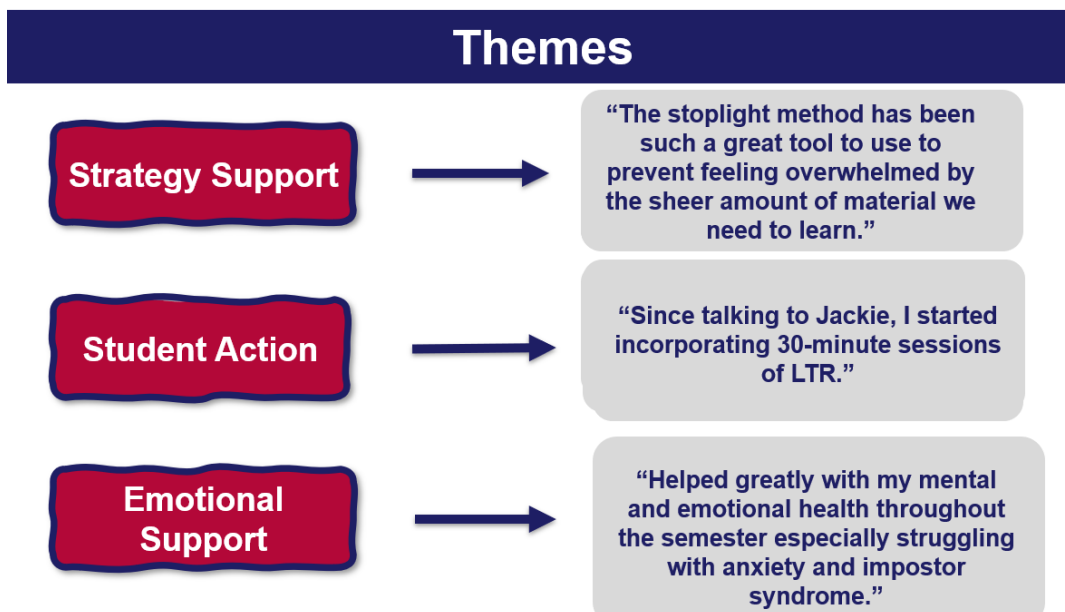


Figure 3. Presenter's slide: qualitative responses for the theme of Emotional Support.



Next steps and additional questions

This quantifiable study has raised some compelling questions: are first-year students who meet with a strategist better prepared academically and emotionally than those who do not? Could students who have benefited from such support evolve into peer mentors or 'strategy buddies' for others? This study can be a starting point for how learning strategists can focus on a more holistic approach towards student progress inclusive of emotional impact.

Author's reflection

This research evolved out of curiosity and a desire to understand what students perceived as impactful from our one-on-one appointments. I was pleased to see that colleagues resonated with the value of emotional support and the relational aspects of working with students, which I believe are foundational to my practice. From my experience, the process of learning involves the whole person, their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, and is shaped through meaningful relationships with teachers, mentors, learning developers, and peers. Yet, while we as educators are aware of this, I often find myself trying to balance the support of student engagement with the multitude of tasks that require our attention. This study reinforced my belief that genuine learning is not isolated

but is, in fact, a relational process where students need to feel supported, understood, and connected. It is through these relationships that students evolve into deeper and more reflective learners.

A few participants raised awareness of how it is instrumental to provide quantifiable data to inform practice. I found these points resonate with me because I realise the need for evidence-based decision making. The question is how to make this reality more practical while not letting up on supporting students in ways that are less easily measured. This feedback has encouraged me to consider how I might integrate more measurable outcomes into my practice, where I can track student progress over time, while still protecting the quality of relational support.

Additionally, a limitation of this research is that the data only reflected students who proactively came in for support. It might be assumed that students who reach out for academic support may already hold a positive view of our services, which might lean towards more favourable responses. This indeed raised the next question: are first-year students who meet with a strategist better prepared academically and emotionally than those who do not? Although my current data cannot answer this directly, several themes that emerged such as increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved study strategies point to the benefits that I would like to explore further in a future study. While this study captures the students' perceived support, it is hard to accurately measure how influential or impactful the support might be because it is not tied to specific academic grades.

A question that was raised was whether students who have gained confidence and skills through academic support could go on to become peer mentors or 'strategy buddies' for others. As it happens, we do have a peer support program in place, where upper-level students are invited to serve as orientation facilitators, peer mentors, or 'strategy buddies' for those in need of additional academic or emotional support. We take pride in the support our upper-level students provide whether it be with offering guidance or encouragement to those students that are just beginning their journey. Peer-led support offers students a shared resource for guidance and growth within a learning community.

I really enjoyed reading all the participants' reflections and feedback of this session. It has given me some great ideas on how I can design and tailor my next research project. I

appreciate that *JLDHE* offers such a great reflective tool for both presenters and participants involved.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Carina Buckley from Southampton Solent University, Hannah Awcock from Edinburgh Napier University, Sam Gridley from University of Surrey, and Kamini Wall from St. George's University. Lastly, a very special thank you to Lisa Francis-Charles from St. George's University for her support and guidance in advising me through this research process.

The community response was edited by Aysha Ahmed, who captured the key themes of the community discussion.

The author did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

References

Laakkonen, J. and Nevgi, A. (2014) 'Relationships between learning strategies, stress, and study success among first-year Veterinary students during an educational transition phase', *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, 41(3), pp.284-293. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.0214-016R1>

Reynolds, A. K. (2020) 'Academic coaching for learners in Medical education: Twelve tips for the learning specialist', *Medical Teacher*, 42(6), pp.616-621. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159x.2019.1607271>

Further reading

Biwer, F., Egbrink, M. G. A. O., Aalten, P. and de Bruin, A. B. H. (2020) 'Fostering effective learning strategies in higher education: a mixed-methods study', *Journal of Applied*

Research in Memory and Cognition, 9(2), pp.186-203. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2020.03.004>

Dattathreya, P. and Shillingford, S. (2017) 'Identifying the ineffective study strategies of first-year Medical School students', *Medical Science Educator*, 27(2), pp.295-307.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-017-0396-2>

Mu, L. and Fosnacht, K. (2019) 'Effective advising: how academic advising influences student learning outcomes in different institutional contexts', *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(4), pp.1283-1307. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0066>

Oakley, B., Rogowsky, B. and Sejnowski, T. J. (2021) *Uncommon sense teaching: practical insights in brain science to help students learn*. London: Penguin Publishing Group.

St. George's University (2025) Department of Educational Services, *St. George's University* [website]. Available at : <https://www.sgu.edu/student-support-services/department-educational-services/> (Accessed: 11 September 2025).

Wells, J., Watson, K., Davis, R. E., Quadri, S. S. A., Mann, J. R., Verma, A., Sharma, M. and Nahar, V. K. (2021) 'Associations among stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional intelligence among Veterinary Medicine students', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), p.3934. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18083934>

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000) 'Attaining self-regulation: a social cognitive perspective', in M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich and M. Zeidner (eds) *Handbook of self-regulation*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp.13-39.

Author details

Jaclyn Tuason is a Learning Strategist at St. George's University, specialising in supporting students within the School of Veterinary Medicine. She conducts personalised one-on-one sessions to help students develop evidence-based learning strategies,

cultivate growth mindsets, and build resilience. In addition to individual support, Jaclyn designs and delivers lessons for the School of Veterinary Medicine Professional Skills courses, providing students with tools to enhance their academic performance and personal development. She also coordinates orientation activities, introducing incoming students to effective learning techniques early in their academic journey.

Licence

©2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).