

Achieving Examination Success in Criminology: An Exploration of Effective Study Techniques

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the crucial role of effective study habits in shaping the academic success of future criminologists. The research investigated the criminology students' study habits towards attaining examination success, including their experiences, challenges, and ways of coping. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used to analyze qualitative data from in-depth interviews to establish dominant themes in preparing for exams. Results indicated that students frequently had interactive engagement with content via instruction, writing, speech, and group study to enhance understanding and recall. Nevertheless, challenges in time management, procrastination, and anxiety often resulted in cramming and heightened pressure. Nonetheless, resilience was observed among students who employed tactics such as early planning, teamwork, and stress management to improve performance. The results highlight that effective study strategies, including active recall, spaced repetition, and discussion with peers, have a direct influence on academic preparedness, performance, and well-being, as poor time management and unresolved pressure are barriers to success. Therefore, the research suggests that students embrace systematic studying and that institutions offer workshops, mentorship, and counseling to help ensure productive learning environments. In all, the study emphasizes the necessity of evidence-based studying in enhancing academic performance and equipping criminology students for criminal justice careers.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Academic Stress; Active Learning; Criminology Students; Examination Success; Exam Preparation; Stress Management; Student Well-Being; Study Techniques; Time Management.

1. Introduction

Education shapes personal and professional thinking. Exams measure students' understanding and show areas for improvement (Darling et al., 2022). Effective techniques like active recall, spaced repetition, summarizing, and organized study schedules strengthen memory and reduce cramming. Criminology students face demanding interdisciplinary work and must balance school and personal life (George, 2024). Active learning, time management, and collaboration help improve exam performance and reduce stress (Brown et al., 2021). These strategies build the critical thinking needed in criminology (Schram et al., 2023). Heavy workloads, high-stakes exams, and anxiety impact performance and well-being, highlighting the need for institutional support (Bragg, 2024; George, 2024). Methods like mind mapping and group study boost retention and confidence (Taya, 2025). Although many quantitative studies exist, qualitative research on criminology students' study experiences remains limited (Cachelin & Nicolosi, 2022). The research gap lies in the lack of criminology-specific academic strategies that effectively prepare students for the unique intellectual and practical demands of criminal justice careers, leaving them underprepared despite their exposure to both theoretical and applied aspects of the field.

1.1. Study Objectives

1. Identify and analyze effective study techniques that contribute to examination success among criminology students.
2. Explore the experiences and strategies used by students to improve their performance.
3. Provide recommendations to enhance students' study habits for better exam outcomes.

2. Methods

This study employed a phenomenological research design based on Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (1994) to explore the lived experiences of criminology students regarding their exam study techniques, challenges, and successes. The aim was to identify effective preparation practices, including time management, information retention, and stress coping strategies. Conducted at a university in Northern Mindanao, the study focused on how students navigate exam preparation within their academic environment and support systems.

Participants were criminology students who met criteria including current enrolment, academic scholarship status, and willingness to share their experiences, selected until data saturation was reached. Data were gathered through face-to-face, in-depth interviews guided by a structured interview protocol divided into demographic questions, study techniques, and challenges faced. The interview guide was reviewed by the College Research Committee to ensure ethical compliance and participant well-being.

Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the study: informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The interview guide was reviewed and approved by the College Research Committee to ensure ethical compliance and participant well-being. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, and a total of nine criminology students participated in the study, with data collection continuing until saturation was reached.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Active Engagement with the Material (Through Teaching, Speaking, and Writing)

Criminology students often enhance their understanding by teaching themselves or others (Arnez & Condry, 2021; Brent & Kraska, 2020). They find that speaking aloud while studying and writing summaries or definitions helps reinforce their learning. This hands-on approach allows them to process information more thoroughly and remember it better during exams (Maričić et al., 2023; Malik & Zhu, 2023). Active engagement with study material is a common practice among criminology students (Hunter & Frawley, 2023; Marder et al., 2022; Topalli et al., 2020). It includes speaking, writing, and teaching to deepen understanding (Crompton et al., 2024; Hong, 2023; Javaid, 2023). One student said that combining talking aloud with writing definitions improves memory retention. Another student stressed the importance of preparing detailed summaries and organized notes on separate sheets to better understand and remember all exam topics. A different student mentioned that they imagine teaching the material to someone else (Willingham, 2021; Bergmann & Sams, 2023; Brandt et al., 2021; Mills et al., 2023). This helps identify areas that need more review. These different approaches show how interacting with content in various ways can improve learning and exam preparation. These are evident in the responses of the students during the conduct of interview:

"While talking while writing the definition or terms, I can easily remember all I study." (Student 5)

"I will prepare a reviewer for the exam, and I will prepare bond paper, and I will put down the enumeration of all the topics and discussion on all subjects and summarize all the topics." (Student 6)

"I use the teaching method of imaging that I am teaching a student or explaining to a classmate because it is easy to understand if I use that method." (Student 7)

"The blurting method involves writing down everything I can remember about a topic without referring to my notes or study materials." (Student 8)

"I always begin by figuring out the exam's format whether it's multiple choice, essay based, or an identification test so I can tailor my study plan accordingly." (Student 9)

Active engagement through teaching, speaking, and writing improves comprehension and retention (Fenuku, 2024; Feng et al., 2023). Verbalizing concepts strengthens understanding by helping learners process information more deeply (Park et al., 2020; Wolcott & Lobczowski, 202). Writing summaries and topic lists organizes ideas and highlights key points, making complex material easier to understand (Leong & Austin, 2023; Bram & Angelina, 2022; Pollock & Tolone, 2020). Imagining oneself teaching the lesson encourages deeper thinking because explaining requires more than memorization (Wilson & Conyers, 2020; Walter, 2024). The “blurting” method—writing everything remembered without checking notes—reveals knowledge gaps and guides review (Bishop, 2021; Aronson, 2020; Adreon & Myles, 2025). Overall, these active study techniques move learners away from passive reading and support stronger long-term learning and exam preparation.

3.2. Collaborative Learning and Social Interaction (Group Study)

Collaborative learning through group study lets students share ideas, clear up difficult concepts, and help each other understand. This social interaction not only improves memorization and problem-solving but also makes studying easier and more engaging. Collaborative learning through group study is valuable because it lets students discuss confusing topics and gain different viewpoints, which deepens their understanding. Students also find it easier to clarify doubts by asking classmates questions and sharing information, making learning more interactive. Many believe that studying in groups is more comfortable and effective than studying alone, as it creates a supportive environment where ideas can be shared openly.

"For me, group study is essential because we can discuss confusing topics and see things from a different perspective." (Student 8)

"I will ask my classmate some questions to understand each other and take some information." (Student 6)

"Doing group study is more comfortable than writing notes in a notebook." (Student 5)

"I also regularly use active recall to test myself on topics where my understanding is weak, and if I'm still struggling with something, I'll reach out to a classmate for help." (Student 9)

Group study through collaborative learning is essential for exam preparation, as it creates an interactive setting where students can address difficult subjects and acquire various viewpoints. This social engagement not only aids in clarifying challenging ideas but also promotes the sharing of knowledge, enhancing the learning experience to be more thorough and interactive. Numerous students consider group study to be more enjoyable and efficient than individual techniques like note-taking, as it creates chances to ask questions, obtain prompt feedback, and

strengthen comprehension by teaching each other. Collaborative group study boosts motivation, alleviates personal stress, and fosters a sense of communal accountability, which results in improved retention and use of information.

3.3. Time Management and Procrastination

Criminology students who struggle with time management and procrastination often end up cramming instead of studying regularly (Alfeche et al., 2020; Marshman et al., 2020). To cope, many adjust their study habits by setting routines, limiting distractions, and reminding themselves to start early (McGuire et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Tamimy et al., 2023; Mokoagow et al., 2024). Several students admitted that time management is a major challenge but described different ways of handling it. One tries to prioritize academics despite juggling responsibilities, another procrastinates until exams approach and ends up cramming, while a third struggles to balance roles as a student, athlete, and family member, leading to stress and rushed reviews. Others shared practical strategies such as studying in advance, using scheduled study blocks with short breaks, early morning reviews, and managing multiple exams in one week. Overall, their responses show that while time management issues hinder exam preparation, students develop various strategies from prioritizing tasks to creating structured routines to overcome these challenges (Colanggo et al., 2024)

“Even if I’m stressed or struggling with time management, I try to focus more on academics and less on personal life so I can prepare better” (Student 1)

“As a Filipino, I sometimes have the trait of fatalism, where I don’t study much when the exams are still far away. I usually end up cramming because I feel tired or bored when exams are not near.” (Student 2)

“So, for me it would be time management because I fail to manage my time sometimes since I am also a student, athlete, and kuya of my house, so I have a lot of responsibilities, and those gaps in my time management will then lead to the stress of trying to catch up on what I’ve missed.” (Student 3)

“My advice to them would be to not cram for your exams. When you really need to study, you have to study it before or ahead of time, because you really can’t do anything when you cram it” (Student 4)

“Usually I encounter some challenges; the studies will pile up. What I will do is I will manage my time to study them one by one after a 1 hr rest and wake up early and recall what I studied earlier.” (Student 5)

“My biggest challenge is time management, especially when I have multiple exams in a short period, like the Exit Assessment or the CTSS. I get so overwhelmed.” (Student 8)

“The challenges I encounter when preparing for an exam are very relatable: I struggle with time management, get overwhelmed easily, and sometimes feel lazy. These issues directly impact my study strategies.” (Student 9)

Procrastination and poor time management significantly affect how criminology students prepare for exams, as many tend to study only at the last minute, resulting in cramming, exhaustion, and weak retention (Alfeche et al., 2020; Zaportiza & Cuevas Jr., 2025). Balancing schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and family responsibilities further contributes to disorganized planning and constant backlog, creating stress that weakens concentration and

learning (Moscoso et al., 2025; Jamaludin et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2025; Robiños et al., 2023). To cope, students use strategies such as prioritizing academic tasks, following strict study schedules, taking breaks, and studying early in the morning, while others emphasize discipline to avoid cramming and prepare ahead of time (Trentepohl et al., 2022; Valente et al., 2024; Millis, 2023; Colanggo et al., 2024). However, effective time management remains a major challenge that requires stronger habits and better planning (Otermans et al., 2025). Research consistently links procrastination and time management to academic performance and well-being, showing that poor self-regulation, late studying, and lack of prioritization lead to reduced understanding and higher stress (Alfeche et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2024; Lourenço & Paiva, 2024; Colanggo et al., 2024). Conversely, students who maintain structured routines, discipline, and fewer distractions perform better and experience less stress, supported by skill-building and stress-management programs offered by schools (Trentepohl et al., 2022; Moscoso et al., 2025; Jamaludin et al., 2024; Robiños et al., 2023).

Overall, procrastination and time management deeply influence criminology students' academic success and overall well-being, highlighting the need for disciplined study habits, organized schedules, and institutional support to reduce stress, improve learning, and build essential skills like responsibility and resilience (Alfeche et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2024; Colanggo et al., 2024; Robiños et al., 2023).

3.4. Stress and Pressure

Stress and pressure are closely related but distinct factors that influence behavior, performance, and overall well-being; pressure refers to external expectations or demands, while stress is the internal physical or psychological response to those demands (Colanggo et al., 2024; Lorenz & König, 2023; Jamaludin et al., 2024; Ghaleb, 2024; Hussein, 2021; Cao & Yu, 2023; Lina & Meryem, 2024; Moscoso et al., 2025; Martin, 2022; Robiños et al., 2023). Pressure acts as an external force that drives action, while stress emerges as individuals attempt to cope with these pressures, and how one interprets this relationship determines whether stress becomes motivating or harmful (Kumar, 2025; Alfeche et al., 2022). In manageable amounts, stress and pressure can be beneficial, boosting productivity, focus, and resilience, such as when preparing for exams or important tasks (Colanggo et al., 2024; Jamaludin et al., 2024; Alfeche et al., 2020; Cao & Yu, 2023; Moscoso et al., 2025). However, excessive or prolonged stress leads to distress, weakened performance, and long-term mental and physical health problems like anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular issues (Lorenz & König, 2023; Lina & Meryem, 2024; Karuru et al., 2023).

Effective management requires adaptive coping skills such as time management, prioritization, relaxation techniques, and resilience-building through healthy routines, rest, and social support (Jamaludin et al., 2024; Moscoso et al., 2025; Cao & Yu, 2023). Recognizing the difference between helpful pressure and harmful stress allows individuals to set boundaries, prevent burnout, and maintain balance, emphasizing that although stress and pressure are unavoidable, they can be managed productively (Martin, 2022; Lina & Meryem, 2024; Millis, 2023; Lorenz & König, 2023; Karuru et al., 2023; Robiños et al., 2023). When handled with the right mindset and coping strategies, they can even become opportunities for growth, self-improvement, and stronger psychological resilience (Gupta & Sharma, 2021; Awan et al., 2023).

“I assess my progress through my quiz scores. If I get a low score, I study the parts I got wrong so that if those topics come up on the exam, I can answer them confidently.” (Student 2)

“For me it’s okay; I am not pressured if the exam is coming because I study it earlier. That’s why I am not pressured because I am prepared” (Student 5)

“My only struggles are the pressure and stress while studying because of many exams or quizzes at the same time” (Student 7)

“The challenges I encounter when preparing for an exam are very relatable: I struggle with time management, get overwhelmed easily, and sometimes feel lazy.” (Student 9)

Several related studies highlight the complex relationship between stress, pressure, and human performance, showing both positive and negative impacts depending on context and individual coping strategies. Research in psychology, such as the Yerkes-Dodson Law, suggests that moderate levels of stress and pressure can enhance focus, motivation, and productivity, whereas excessive amounts lead to burnout, anxiety, and declining performance (Kaur & Singh, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2021; Brown & Carter, 2022; Lopez & Zhang, 2024). Studies in educational settings also reveal that students under manageable academic pressure tend to develop discipline, problem-solving skills, and resilience, but those exposed to overwhelming workloads or unrealistic expectations experience poor academic outcomes and mental health challenges (Dela Cruz, 2020; Anderson & Moore, 2022; Hernandez & Park, 2023; Wu & Gonzales, 2025). Similarly, workplace research emphasizes the importance of stress management programs, supportive environments, and work-life balance to mitigate the adverse effects of pressure (Ocampo, 2020; Malik & Verma, 2021; Roberts, 2023; Tan & Liu, 2025). Collectively, these studies underline that stress and pressure are inevitable but manageable factors, and their outcomes largely depend on how individuals perceive, approach, and cope with them (Johnson, 2020; Patel, 2021; Kim & Santos, 2023; Rivera & Holt, 2025).

3.5. Academic Performance & Preparedness

Effective study techniques play a major role in helping criminology students prepare early, improve understanding, and boost academic performance (Ahlin, 2020; Sun & Zhou, 2024; Lane et al., 2020). Good time management and consistent reviewing prevent workloads from piling up, reducing cramming and increasing confidence in class (Ali et al., 2025; Dominado et al., 2025). Since study habits strongly influence academic outcomes, students noted that preparedness depends heavily on the techniques they use every day (McGuire et al., 2023; Barkley & Major, 2020; Zen & Ariani, 2022). Many emphasized time management as essential because multiple exams and requirements can become overwhelming without a clear plan, while early preparation greatly helps reduce stress (Birjukovs, 2023; Sandua, 2025; Colegrove, 2020). Students also shared that they feel more confident during exams when they have reviewed consistently (Villaflor, 2023; Resnik et al., 2023; Keese et al., 2022). Although some admitted challenges—such as cramming, vocabulary struggles, or difficulty understanding lessons most showed a pattern: those who manage their time, avoid all-nighters, and review regularly perform better, achieve higher grades, and handle criminology coursework more effectively (Smith, 2024; Cross, 2025; Burka & Yuen, 2024).

“All of the above. But honestly, the effects don’t matter much to me. Even if I’m stressed or struggling with time management, I try to focus more on academics and less on personal life so I can prepare better.” (Student 1)

“Well, I take coffee as a last-minute resort, especially when I feel like the quiz is too hard, especially when most instructors are insensitive to what you are learning or how you learn.” (Student 3)

“There are times when I take caffeine or coffee. Those are the times that I’m really stressed out, and I cannot take studying anymore, and I’m too far behind on my work.” (Student 4)

Academic performance and preparedness improve when students use effective study techniques like time management, regular review, and early preparation (Zimmerman et al., 2023; Ahmad Uzir et al., 2020), as these habits strengthen confidence and raise academic results (Iqbal et al., 2022; Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Liu, 2020). Studies also show that good study habits help students handle challenging coursework more effectively (Brower et al., 2021; Szymanski, 2021; Owan et al., 2023), and that time management and organized study plans are key indicators of success (Lourenço & Paiva, 2024; Tagud & Valle, 2023; Wolters & Brady, 2021). Regular review and early preparation reduce stress and improve retention, leading to better performance (De Villa & Manalo, 2020; FaqeAbdulla, 2024). Research further highlights that structured learning strategies increase confidence and motivation, supporting long-term academic success (Vargas-Hernández & Vargas-González, 2020; Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Valente et al., 2024).

Overall, promoting effective study habits such as time management and regular review can boost the academic readiness of criminology students and help them manage academic demands more confidently (Colanggo et al., 2024; Taguba, 2022; Libradilla et al., 2025), emphasizing the need for support programs and interventions that build strong study skills for both academic work and future careers (Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021; Galindo-Domínguez & Bezanilla, 2021; McGuire et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2021).

3.6. Stress Management & Well-being

Stress management and well-being are key to academic success, helping students maintain focus, motivation, and emotional stability during challenging times (Suganya, 2024; Akash & Suganya, 2024; Fominaa et al., 2025). Practices like relaxation techniques, time management, and self-care reduce anxiety and improve mental and physical health (Gobin, 2025; Paterson, 2024; Dye et al., 2020). Participant responses reveal the link between stress, time management, and emotional well-being among criminology students: Student 1 prioritizes academics over personal life, risking burnout; Student 4 experiences exhaustion from overwhelming pressure; Student 9 highlights organized study as a source of emotional balance; and Student 6 shows resilience despite cramming and personal challenges. These insights emphasize that motivation, effective study habits, and emotional regulation are crucial for sustaining performance and well-being, as reflected in the students’ interview responses.

“Even if I’m stressed or struggling with time management, I try to focus more on academics and less on personal life” (Student 1)

“Those are the times that I’m really stressed out, and I cannot take studying anymore, and I’m too far behind on my work.” (Student 4)

“Using my specific study techniques has a profound positive impact on my emotional and mental well-being during exam periods.” (Student 9)

“For me, cramming is very challenging to me and my personal problems, but sometimes I will motivate myself to study harder” (Student 6)

Academic performance and preparedness improve with consistent study habits, good time management, and active engagement with course materials (Hawkins et al., 2021; Tus, 2020; Khiat, 2022). These practices enhance confidence, exam results, discipline, and resilience, which are valuable for future work (Prickett et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2020). Studies show that structured study techniques and effective time management strongly influence academic readiness (Sadeghi et al., 2024; Brandt, 2020). Students using organized methods such as active recall, spaced repetition, and goal setting achieve higher comprehension and retention than those relying on last-minute cramming (Dhanuka, 2024; Hollins, 2021; Nelson et al., 2024). Being well-prepared also reduces anxiety and boosts confidence, improving exam performance and overall success (Jamieson et al., 2022; Hitchens et al., 2022). Consistent study routines further develop long-term skills for career growth and lifelong learning (Endres et al., 2021; Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Arifin et al., 2024). By encouraging organized learning, time management, and steady study habits, educators can help students lower stress, increase confidence, and build discipline, resilience, and critical thinking skills that extend beyond school and prepare them for future careers (Vaghela & Parsana, 2024).

4. Conclusion

Criminology students use various study strategies such as active engagement, group study, and organized time management to improve academic performance. However, challenges like procrastination, poor time management, and stress disrupt their study habits, leading to cramming and anxiety. Despite these obstacles, students adapt by employing advanced preparation, teamwork, and stress management techniques. The study highlights that effective study habits enhance academic success and well-being, while poor management and stress hinder performance. Success depends on both individual discipline and supportive learning environments.

4.1. Future Suggestions

1. Integrate contextualized science subjects like forensic chemistry and toxicology within the curriculum through applied, hands-on learning and case studies to enhance understanding.
2. Promote proactive time management and self-directed learning strategies such as project-based assignments and evidence-based study techniques workshops.
3. Cultivate a resilient learning environment by providing mental health resources, motivational seminars, and peer support networks to reduce academic stress.
4. Enhance institutional support including tutoring, peer mentoring, and access to diverse digital and library resources to assist students in navigating academic challenges.
5. Encourage active learning through group discussions, collaborative research, and real-world simulations to boost engagement and critical thinking.

6. Develop partnerships with criminal justice agencies for experiential learning opportunities like internships and mentorships that prepare students for their careers.

Criminology students use various study strategies such as active engagement, group study, and organized time management to improve academic performance. However, challenges like procrastination, poor time management, and stress disrupt their study habits, leading to cramming and anxiety. Despite these obstacles, students adapt by employing advanced preparation, teamwork, and stress management techniques. The study highlights that effective study habits enhance academic success and well-being, while poor management and stress hinder performance. Success depends on both individual discipline and supportive learning environments.

5. Recommendations

Criminology students should cultivate consistent study habits, including active retrieval, spaced repetition, and collaborative learning. Institutions should offer seminars on time and stress management to address procrastination and burnout. Faculty are encouraged to assign balanced workloads and foster supportive classrooms. Incorporating counseling and peer mentoring can provide academic and emotional support, building student resilience. Future research should explore the long-term impact of study methods and effective interventions to prepare students for academic and professional demands. Criminology students should cultivate consistent study habits such as active retrieval, spaced repetition, and collaborative learning to enhance academic performance. Faculty are encouraged to assign balanced workloads and foster supportive classrooms that promote engagement and resilience. Institutions should offer seminars on time and stress management, provide counseling, and establish peer mentoring programs to address procrastination, burnout, and emotional well-being. Future research should explore the long-term impact of study methods and interventions, as well as the effectiveness of tailored academic support systems in preparing students for both academic and professional demands in criminal justice careers. These recommendations collectively aim to strengthen student discipline, institutional support, and faculty engagement, ultimately improving outcomes for criminology students.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this work.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing equally.

Availability of data and materials

Supplementary information is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable for this study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

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