

We can train ourselves to be much smarter than we currently are

There are many ways to define “smartness”, such as intelligence, good decision-making, emotional well-being, being well-dressed, learning new skills, music proficiency -- the list goes on. It is clearly difficult to define smartness, however, it is easy to define changes in smartness. For instance, scoring higher on tests than previous attempts, or acquiring new football skills are examples of quantifiable changes in smartness. This essay will argue that humans can become smarter through methods that induce changes in smartness in three ways. These methods include using active learning for better cognitive outcomes, adopting a growth mindset in learning, and meditating to gain emotional intelligence.

One way to better absorb information is through active learning – the process of engaging and analyzing the content rather than passively listening or reading it. For example, a study by Benware et al. (1984) found that students who actively learned would learn more than students who passively learned a concept. Researchers implemented active learning in students by having them teach others (Benware et al., 1984). Results showed that students in the active learning group had higher conceptual test scores than students in the passive learning group (Benware et al., 1984). This study shows that through discussing and actively engaging with class content, students were able to achieve higher test scores and higher conceptual understanding than students who passively learned.

The views you have on yourself and the environment can also impact how much you learn. Having a growth mindset – the belief that your skills and knowledge can be honed through effort and that failure is necessary – can result in drastic learning differences in comparison to those with fixed mindsets – the belief that your knowledge cannot be changed (Dweck, 2006). For instance, if one accepts failure and tries to overcome it, it could help one acquire new skills or knowledge as opposed to giving up after failure.

Also, frequent and long-term meditation has shown cognitive and emotional improvements (Zeidan et al. 2010). Zeidan et al. (2010) showed that participants who meditated 20-minutes daily significantly improved in cognitive, mood and memory tests over four sessions (Zeidan et al. 2010). A majority of the participants also reported reduced anxiety and stress levels (Zeidan et al. 2010). Clearly, a positive change in emotion and intelligence as measured by the cognitive and memory tasks were induced via meditation.

The three methods that increases smartness all share the quality of malleability. Becoming smarter, whether it be in intelligence or acquiring new skills, is possible with effort, practice, and having an open mindset.

References:

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