

TIME MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENTS

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Abstrak

This study examined the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) distance learning students' background, management of time and commitment to their studies. Almost every student agreed that time management is important. Although the lack of time to study is one of the major problems encountered by the students, less than three quarters of them actually planned their activities and only about half of them make full use of their free time during office hours. The findings also indicated that almost 85% of the students revised the lessons either before or after the lecture or both.

PENGURUSAN MASA PELAJAR PENDIDIKAN JARAK JAUH UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

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Kajian ini telah meneliti latar belakang pelajar pendidikan jarak jauh UUM serta pengurusan masa dan komitmen mereka terhadap pelajaran. Hampir semua pelajar bersetuju bahawa pengurusan masa adalah penting. Walaupun kekangan masa merupakan salah satu masalah utama yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar, tidak sampai tiga perempat daripada mereka yang membuat perancangan untuk aktiviti-aktiviti mereka dan hanya lebih kurang separuh yang menggunakan sepenuhnya masa yang terluang semasa di pejabat. Walau bagaimanapun, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa hampir 85% daripada pelajar berusaha membuat ulangkaji sama ada sebelum atau selepas kuliah atau kedua-duanya sekali.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is an alternative approach to conventional activities of education and training (Chute et. al, 1999). Distance instructions are delivered through audiotape, videotape, radio and television broadcasting, satellite transmission microcomputers and the Internet. According to the American Council on Education, distance learning is defined as a system or a process of connecting learners with distributed learning resources. Distance learning is a global phenomenon and it offers formal learning opportunities to people with family, time and job constraints. Previously, geographic distance from educational institution was the main reason for joining a distance learning programme. Nowadays, many

choose to enrol in the distance learning programmes because of their responsibility to be on the job to support their family.

Time-constraints to attend weekly classes due to family responsibilities is a reason why students registered in distance learning programmes (Livieratos & Frank, 1992; Parrott, 1995) while women commonly cite their responsibilities as mothers of young children as their reason (Faith, 1988).

Students enrolled in the distance learning programme are adults over 26 years old (Hyatt, 1992). Since most of them are working and have responsibilities towards their employers and family, they did not have much time to spend on their studies (Karsono, 1993). Therefore, distance learning students are basically expected to be able to allocate their time wisely for their family, studies and career.

Individuals who enrol as distance learning students after having left formal schooling for several years may face difficulty in coordinating work, family and study at the same time and remained successful at all three. The key to being a successful student is to establish and maintain study habits and learning techniques that are appropriate for his or her lifestyle. Most students find that their greatest challenge is effective time management.

Research shows that 60 minutes of study during the day is equivalent to 90 minutes of study at night (Walter, 1989). Findings from the same research revealed that it is good practice to study soon after attending lecture type courses and in general, optimum efficiency is reached by planning to study in blocks of one hour whereby 50 minutes of study is followed by a 10 minutes break. It has been suggested that students should read before their lecture (Suhaimi, 1995).

Students are recommended to make daily and weekly plans as well as goal setting (Carter and Kravits, 1996) and it has been proposed that the best way to study is through planning a weekly schedule (Campbell, 1997). Many universities provide some basic principles of time management to their students. The University of Minnesota at Duluth provides time management principles in the student's handbook. Some basic principles that were included are that students should identify the best time for studying, study difficult subjects first, use distributed learning and practice, make sure the surroundings are conducive for studying, make room for entertainment and relaxation, make sure there is time for sleep and food and also to try to combine activities.

The Counselling Services at the University of Victoria provided hints for planning the time for study such as surveying required readings before attending

lectures, being realistic in planning the time for study, and having an agenda for each study period. Palomar College Counselling Centre listed several key points in managing time that included setting goals, listing priorities and making time for friends.

The Centre for Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) of the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is responsible for coordinating UUM's undergraduate programmes via distance learning. The programmes offered are the Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) and the Bachelor in Public Management (BPM). Both programmes are open to adults with at least five years working experiences and with a basic minimum qualification in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE).

A study was conducted to examine UUM's distance learning students time management ability and it is hoped that the findings will assist PACE in providing aids and advice to them regarding time management. As adults, these students are capable of self-directing in terms of career and daily life but it is a different matter in studying (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1988).

METHOD

The distance learning students attend lectures at three UUM distance learning centres: the UUM main campus in Sintok and the UUM distance learning centres in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Lumpur. Five hundred questionnaires consisting of the student's demographic profile and questions on how the students manage their time during their studies were distributed to the students with a 69% (or 345 questionnaires) return rate.

Descriptive analysis using frequency count and cross-tabulation on 259 valid questionnaires was conducted. The respondents comprised of 194 BBA students (114 male and 80 female) and 65 BPM students (40 male and 25 female). Cross-tabulation analysis between time management activities with students profile was performed to identify the antecedent factor that may contribute to time management attitude.

RESULTS

Four students (1 BBA male, 1 BBA female and 2 BPM female) were unemployed and therefore did not provide any response to the utilisation of office time for revision or completing assignment.

Among the UUM distance learning students, 67.6% were more than 30 years of age, out of which 118 are males and 57 females as depicted in Table 1.

Among the students under thirty years of age, 36 are males while 48 are females.

From the survey, it can be seen that although time management is important to almost every student, approximately 25% did not plan their daily activities. Looking at students who planned their activities, 36.1% were under thirty, 21.5% were between 30 to 35 and 42.4% were above thirty-five. However, only half of the students utilised their free time during office hours for their studies. For males respondents over thirty-five, there are equal numbers of those who utilised their free time during office hours and those who did not. The finding is also almost the same for males respondents under thirty. However, in the 30 to 35 age category, the percentage those who utilised their available time is higher. As for the females above thirty-five, a higher percentage make use of their free time during office hours. The percentage is reversed in the other two age categories.

There were only 15.4% of respondents who revise neither before nor after the lecture. Nineteen of them were under thirty, 11 in the 30-35 category and 10 above thirty-five. Among the students who revise for lectures, 29.7% are under thirty, 46.6% are above thirty and 23.7% in the middle category.

Table 1 Cross-Tabulation for Time Management Activity and Age

		Age Group					
		<30 years		30 - 35 years		> 35 years	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Revise before lecture only		1	3	1	4	10	2
Revise after lecture only		10	12	14	11	9	7
Revise before and after lecture		15	24	17	5	55	19
Revise neither before nor after lecture		10	9	5	6	7	3
Utilise free time during office hours for revision or completing assignment	Yes	17	21	22	10	40	19
	No	19	25	15	15	40	12
Plan for daily activity	Yes	29	40	26	15	59	22
	No	7	8	11	11	22	9
Time management is important	Yes	36	46	36	26	81	31
	No	0	2	1	0	0	0

Table 2 Cross-Tabulation for Time Management Activity and Marital Status

Activity		Single		Married	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Revise before lecture only		3	4	9	15
Revise after lecture only		7	17	26	13
Revise before and after lecture		17	25	70	23
Revise neither before nor after lecture		8	11	14	7
Utilise office free time for revision or assignment completion	Yes	17	26	62	24
	No	18	30	56	22
Plan for daily activity	Yes	27	43	87	34
	No	8	14	32	14
Time management is important	Yes	35	55	118	48
	No	0	2	1	0

Table 2 depicts that about 64.5% of all the students in the distance learning programme are married. Among 167 who are married, there are 119 males and 48 females. Out of 92 single students, 35 are males while 57 are females. It was observed that 63.35% of students who planned daily activities are married. There was also a higher percentage of married students who utilised their free time at the office compared to the single ones with a difference of about 33%. In general, there was a higher percentage of those who planned their activities and those who utilised free time at the office than those who did not regardless of marital status and gender. In terms of managing time for revision purposes, almost 80% of single students and 90% of married students did their revisions close to lecture hours either before or after class or both.

Table 3 depicts the cross-tabulation for time management activity and students' achievement. There were 16 students with excellent results, 106 with good results, 125 with average and 12 with poor results. Among the best 16 students, 62.5% planned their activity while 37.5% did not. About 76.4% of the good students, 72.8% of the average students and 75% of the poor students planned their activity. Regarding utilisation free time at the office, for every achievement category, the percentage of utilisation was about 50%.

Among the 16 students with excellent results, there were only three students who managed to be excellent although they did not practice revising close to lecture hours. In the good and average achievement categories, 55.2% and 51.9% obtained such results by revising before as well as after lecture sessions. A quarter of those in the poor results category did not practice any revising close to lecture hours.

Table 3 Cross-Tabulation for Time Management Activity and Achievement

Activity		CGPA Result			
		<2.0	2.0-2.66	2.67 - 3.32	3.33-4.00
Revise before lecture only		0	9	9	3
Revise after lecture only		1	27	28	7
Revise before and after lecture		8	69	55	3
Revise neither before nor after lecture					
Study time	Morning	7	88	78	11
	Afternoon	0	6	12	0
	Evening	1	29	28	6
	Night	11	104	85	14
Utilise office free time for revision or assignment completion	Yes	7	61	54	7
	No	5	61	55	9
Plan for daily activity	Yes	9	91	81	10
	No	3	34	25	6
Time management is important	Yes	12	124	104	16
	No	0	1	2	0

When asked about morning as a suitable time for them to study, 184 agreed, while 18 felt that afternoon was suitable and 64 agreed that evening was a suitable time. However, a high percentage of 82.6% felt that night hours was suitable for them.

Form the survey, approximately 70% of them thought that they lacked time to study during weekdays as they were occupied with their jobs. The little time they can spare for studying was spent on completing assignments.

DISCUSSION

The high percentage of students aged more than 30 years enrolled was due to the minimum qualification of five years working experience required to get into the programme. Since majority of the students are employed, they needed to properly manage their time between work, family and studies efficiently. As far as taking the advantage to revise before or after the lecture was concerned, 84.6% did so while only 15.4% did not put it into practice. Therefore, in that sense, quite a large percentage was committed to their studies. About 80% of the students who did very well have made the effort to revise regularly either before or after class or both. According to research on adult education, students who took the initiative in studying learnt more and usually did well in their studies (Knowles, 1985; Brookfield, 1986; Karsono, 1993). With regards to the time of day suitable for studying, 214 out of 259 students thought that night time was one of the suitable hours for them to study. This was probably due to the fact that many of them are at work during the day. This opinion might be the reason why only half of them utilise their free time at the office for their studies.

Cost of the programme and time constraint are two main problems encountered by most distance learning students. Many of them most probably keep their job to cover the cost. In fact, lack of time was the most frequently mentioned problem faced by distance learning students even more than twenty years ago (Murgatroyd, 1978).

CONCLUSION

Almost every student in the UUM distance learning programme agreed that time management is important. However, action speaks louder than words. Practically, less than three quarters of them actually plan their activities and only about half of them utilised free time at the office for their studies.

There is a great need for every distance learning student to have a proper guide and motivation on how to study and manage their time wisely since lack of time is one of the major problems encountered by them.

Coordinators of distance education programme could strongly suggest students to survey required readings before attending lectures as well as provide sample study plans in the process of aiding students to be realistic in planning their time not just for studying but also for other daily responsibilities.

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