



ASSESSMENT OF TIME MANAGEMENT CONDITIONS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was carried out using a descriptive survey design to investigate the extent to which Open and Distance Learning (ODL) students in Nigeria manage their time effectively. One research question and two hypotheses were used in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select 312 ODL students from six centres across the geo-political zones of the country. The six centres were randomly selected from the zones. A 25-item Time Management Questionnaire (TMQ), in the form of a four-point Likert type scale adopted from the standardised Wayne University time management questionnaire, was used for data collection. Percentages, means and aggregate means were used to analyse the frequency responses for research the question. The t- test of independent samples mean was used to test the null hypotheses. The results showed that ODL students in Nigeria have effective time management level ranging from good to excellent (40-50 points). The null hypotheses were not relected, meaning that there is no significant difference in effective time management level of the male and female; and post graduate and undergraduate ODL students in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Assessment, time management, Open and Distance Learning, students.*

Introduction

When we think of time, we tend to think of personal time which can be loosely described as managing our time to waste less of it in doing the things we have to do, so that we have more to do the things we want to do. According to Ward (2015), time generally refers to the development of processes and

tools that increase efficiency and productivity. This goes to inform us that time is often thought of or presented as a set of skills. The theory behind this is that once we master the skills, we will be more organised, efficient and happier. According to Ward (2015), personal time skills here include goal seeking, delegating, scheduling among others. This is why Abioye (2015) described time as life. Wasted time is wasted life. Time lost is life lost. Time is common. It is the same for everybody. Every person needs time and everyone has time. This is not the clock time, but the management of the time itself. According to Sayrah (2015), the sum total of our lives in this world is broken down into this precious four letter word TIME and what we did with it.

Most of the learners in the ODL system face the challenge of time. At the first time of entry, most of them ask themselves whether they will be able to handle both job and studies at the same time. But, according to Merlin (2012), the answer is YES. This is because for everyone, it should be clear from the beginning that studying and keeping one's job requires one to sacrifice more than a regular full time student. This should not cause worries, because, according to Sayrah (2015), thousands of students have proved that this is not only feasible, but in fact, it is quite manageable. However, the extent to which an individual succeeds depends entirely on him alone. This is why it is necessary to find out if the students of ODL in Nigeria have effective management of their time in order to succeed.

Every ODL student has one or more distractions to grapple with. These may come from family, friends, social interactions, social media, internet, work and many more activities. But they must and need to realise and understand the value of time. This is why Edu (2015) reasoned that time flies by really quick means and once the time is gone, it does not return. It is therefore better not to waste time.

It is better to utilise it in a productive manner. This study is intended therefore to investigate the extent to which learners of ODL in Nigeria manage their time effectively for productivity and efficiency.

The Concept of Time

Time can be described as the indefinite progress of existence and events in the past, present and future regarded as a whole. A point of time is measured in hours, minutes and seconds. Thus we can say past midnight or noon. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2011), time is a measure in which

events can be ordered from the past through the present into the future, and also the measure of durations of events and the intervals between them. It is often referred to as the fourth dimension along with the three spatial dimensions. Hawking (2012), reported that time has long been a major subject of study in religion, philosophy and science, but defining it in a manner applicable to all fields without circularity has consistently eluded scholars. But diverse fields like business, industry, sports, science and the performing arts incorporate some notion of time in their respective measuring systems.

Navratil (2009), defined time simply as what clocks measure. However, this is a problematically vague and self-referential definition which makes use of the device or instrument used for measuring time as the definition of the subject. Another definition by Wolfson (2006), says that time is what keeps everything from happening at once. This can be said to be without substantive meaning in the absence of the description of simultaneity in the context of the limitations of human sensation, observation of events and the perception of such events.

It may be noted here that many prominent philosophers have two contrasting viewpoints about time. A group called the realists, including Isaac Newton, see time as part of the fundamental structure of the universe. That is to say that time is a dimension independent of events, in which events occur in sequence. According to Hawking (2012), this is sometimes referred to as the Newtonian time. However, the opposing group led by Gottfried Leibniz and Immanuel Kant noted that time does not refer to any kind of container which events and objects pass through, nor to any entity that flows. That is to say that time is a part of a fundamental intellectual structure, together with space and number, within which human beings sequence and compare events. In other words, time is neither an event nor a thing and therefore not in itself measurable nor can it be travelled.

We can take time as one of the seven fundamental physical quantities in both the International System of Units (ISU) and International System of Quantities (ISQ). Time is used to define other quantities such as velocity. But according to Wolfson (2006), defining time in terms of such quantities results in circularity of definitions. From the descriptions of time, we can bring out

an operational definition of time. That observing a certain number of repetitions of one or another standard cyclical event constitutes one standard unit such as seconds, is highly useful in the conduct of both advanced experiments and everyday affairs of life (Hawking, 2012). This definition leaves aside the question of whether there is something called time apart from the counting activity mentioned, that flows and that can be measured. Looking at the concept of time, a lot of questions can be asked. For instance, if we look at a single continuum of space time, we see that it brings questions about space into questions about time. These questions have their roots in the works of early students of natural philosophy. One can also ask whether or not time itself is felt as a sensation or as judgment, is a matter of argument.

Temporal measurements have occupied scientists and technologists. They were the prime motivation in navigation and astronomy. Periodic events and periodic motions have long served as standards for units of time. Some examples include the apparent motion of the sun across the sky, the phases of the moon, and the heartbeat among others. Today, the international unit of time is the second. It is defined in terms of radiation emitted by caesium atoms. Time is also of very significant social importance having economic value as well as personal value. This is why we hear that time is money. It is due to an awareness of the limited nature of time in each day and in human life span. For the purpose of this study, the question is not about time, but the management of time.

Time Management

Every ODL student need to be able to understand what time means to him/her. This is a key factor which can help him/her make his/her day productive. Sierra and Trapani (2015) reported that this issue has been spoken about by many professionals who share their personal opinion on the vital point that can be helpful to those who apply them. Time management refers to the way we organise and plan how long we spend on specific activities. The ODL student is faced always with a thousand and one things that are constantly demanding his attention, so many distracters, from study to work, to leisure, to family chores, to helping out others, to social obligations. It seems like there is not enough time to do everything that needs to be done. During examinations, the ODL student may have to combine intensive studies with other activities. He may feel overwhelmed. But he

should understand that he does not have time for everything. He has time only to do things that are important in his life. It is very important for him to develop effective strategies for managing his time so as to balance the conflicting demands of time.

Time management is one of those skills which no one can teach you in the school, but you have to learn it. For Merlin (2012), no matter how smart you are if you cannot organise your time well, no matter how skilled you are if procrastination keeps you from managing your time well, you will not get your work done. Every serious ODL student must know about this time management issue. This is because different people have different schedules to their different type of jobs and studies. What may work for one student may not work for another. It means that you must know how your work and life pattern function. This is another key point to take note of.

It is important to differentiate between clock time and real time. According to Dawn (2014), clock time is the result of activities planned in alignment to the time of our watch or clock. But real time is the amount of daily activities we get involved that actually define our level of productivity. The truth is that because people of today's world are multi- functional, they cannot actually live on clock time. The reason, according to Withmer (2014), is that life is unpredictable, especially for people who are engaged in multiple tasks daily. It means that one can define his level of productivity by the amount of task he accomplishes each day but not by the number of things he does each hour.

Effective Time Management for ODL Students

1. Every ODL student needs to manage his time effectively. He needs to avoid distractions in order to achieve his desired success. When planning a time management schedule, he should have it in mind that he is looking forward to be productive in the number of tasks he desires to achieve. Sayrah (2015) reported four major ways by which an ODL student should manage his time.
2. It is advisable to plan each day. Take the first 30 minutes of every day to plan your day. Have a vision of what you want your day to look like, how you want it to go. Do not start the day until you have completed your time plan. Set specific, clearly defined and realistic goals for each day.
3. Learn to prioritise. Divide your activities into

important/unimportant, urgent/not urgent. Focus on important and urgent tasks rather than those that are not important or those that do not move you towards your goals. Prioritising will make you efficient as well as effective. You may keep a list of tasks and finish these tasks. But if those tasks are not important, you are just efficient but not effective. So keep a to-do-list and list your tasks in order of importance and urgency. This helps to order your thought and save your time.

4. Avoid procrastination. Do what you are supposed to do when you are supposed to do it. Do not defer it. This will help you overcome procrastination and laziness.
5. Be persevering. Things always do not go the way we plan and therefore we must plan to roll with it. If you make a list and tried following through, but it did not work out, do not give up. Develop a positive attitude, look for where problem is coming from and deal with it.

Contributing to effective time management for the ODL student, Linderman (2015) listed five important skills. These are:-

1. The ability to say no. Learning to say no to things that are not important can make you feel dammed and near impossible when you are an ODL student. But saying yes to everything can often be impossible too. Learning how to say no is difficult but important for good time management.
2. Spacing things out: do not procrastinate. Do not wait for the last minute or hour to get started. Space things out a bit to help you manage your time and workload in a steady flow.
3. Use social time wisely: always remind yourself that social time can wait till after you have finished the important things for the day. These should include your studies and assignments.
4. Prioritising and reprioritising: no matter how on top of things you are, life can just happen sometimes. For instance, you may get sick, your computer may crash, and etc. good time management requires the ability to prioritise and reprioritise again as things come up. This implies that having good time management skills means that when things shift around you will be able to deal with it without suddenly finding yourself in a crisis.
5. Keeping your health/ sleep/ exercise in check: make out time to eat,

sleep and exercise. The filling of these three things can really make all the difference in your ability to manage your, time well in. the ODL system.

Victoria (2014), did also suggest few tips to help the ODL student make the most of his time and study. These are:

- a) Organise your study around other commitments.
- b) Be realistic about your study schedules.
- c) Try to get some study done every day.
- d) Set realistic goals.
- e) Be realistic about your concentration span.

For Dawn (2014), time management can be in the form of these:

- a) Keep prioritized to-do lists: list tasks you must complete in order of priority from most important to least important. Cross off items as you complete them.
- b) Schedule breaks: schedule breaks at regular times. You will be less likely to goof off when you should be working.
- c) Learn to delegate: do not try to do everything yourself. Assign jobs to others.
- d) Learn to say no: it is better to turn down an assignment than fail to complete it.
- e) Stop procrastination: procrastination can ruin your career if it results in completing projects late or not at all.
- f) Get enough sleep: although it is tempting to long hours, in the end you are actually less effective when you are tired.

Summarize the effective time management skills, Sierra and Trapani (2015) suggest as follows:

- a) Make sure you plan your day by taking at least 30 minutes first thing when you wake up.
- b) Endeavour to make a to-do-list of things you want to achieve for that day.
- c) You should be able to set up a daily tasks in a priority list, from most important to least important. This will help you to determine what will be more productive to the daily goal.
- d) Ensure you eliminate distractions as they arise during the day. This will help you to stay focused on what is important.

- e) Avoid doing multiple tasks at the same time. This will make you be disorganised and therefore achieve nothing at the end of the day.
- f) At times of work overload try to take a break and relax or get into other non- working activity.
- g) Try to take note of the activities that make you more productive. Focus on applying these methods regularly. This will help to increase your productivity rate daily.
- h) As the day progresses try to work on the most productive goals that are at the top of your list. By doing this you will be guaranteed a day of great accomplishment.
- i) Endeavour to set time out for recreational activity or relaxation moment, where you will need to refresh yourself before plunging back to your tasks.
- j) As the day ends take a list of the activities that you did for evaluation. This will help you to earmark things you need to take note of whether they are helpful or not.
- k) You should always get a good night sleep of 7- 8 hours every day. This is very healthy for your body.
- l) Once in a while exercise for the body can help to revitalise you for higher productivity.

According to Witmer (2015), every ODL student needs time management skills to enable him complete the responsibilities which are required of him daily. He will have other benefits like:-

1. Feel less anxiety when projects are due or tests dates are approaching.
2. Good time management skills will help them make better decisions.
3. They will have more time for family, friends and relationships.
4. These skills will help them get better grades in their academics.
5. The skills will help to take the “hectic” out of their schedules. It will make everyone around him feel calmer.
6. Having more time on hand, will make the ODL student to be able to have valuable downtime instead of having downtime that is filled with the stress of knowing that you have something to do or being disappointed that you did not get things done.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study is to find out the extent to which ODL students in Nigeria manage their time effectively for increased productivity.

It is also meant to ascertain whether there is a significant difference in the time management conditions between male and female students on the one hand and between post graduate and undergraduate students on the other hand.

Research Question

To what extent do ODL students in Nigeria manage their time effectively?

Research Hypotheses

Ho1. There is no significant difference in effective time management condition between male and female ODL students in Nigeria.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in effective time management condition between post graduate and undergraduate ODL students in Nigeria.

Methodology Design of the Study

This study was carried out using descriptive survey. The subjects were given questionnaires. They responded to them and information was collected and used for analysis.

Population and Samples

The population of the study consists of all the ODL students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Six study centres, one from each of the geo-political zones in Nigeria, were randomly selected for the study. Availability sampling procedure was used to get the subjects. Out of 500 questionnaires given out to the students in the six study centres, 312 were returned and used for the analysis. The distribution of the respondents is

Table 1: Distribution of Responses from the Six Study Centres

S/N	Study Centre	Male	Female	Total	Post Grad.	Under Grad.	Total
1	OWERRI	34	30	64	30	34	64
2	ABEOKUTA	25	27	52	22	30	52
3	PORT HARCOURT	36	26	62	30	32	62
4	BAUCHI	29	17	46	20	26	46
5	KANO	20	15	35	15	20	35
6	ILORIN	28	25	53	23	30	53
	TOTALS	172	140	312	140	172	312

Instrumentation

A 25 item questionnaire called Time Management Questionnaire (TMQ) in the form of a Likert scale developed and standardised by the advising centre, Wayne State University and retrieved from advising.wayne.edu/hndbk/time.php/ was adopted and used. The instrument was administered to the subjects through some staff of the centres.

Results

Table 2: Frequencies, Percentages, and Mean Responses of the Subjects

S/N	Items	SAM	A=3	D=2	SD=1	Mean
1	I do things in order of priority.	121 38.8%	102 36.7%	59 18.9%	30 9.6%	3.01
2	I accomplish what needs to be during the day.	107 34.0%	111 35.6%	50 15.0%	44 14.4%	2.90
3	I always get assignments done time.	152 48.7%	103 33.0%	34 10.9%	23 7.4%	3.23
4	I feel I use my time effectively.	158 50.6%	99 31.7%	33 10.6%	22 7.1%	3.25
5	I tackle difficult or unpleasant without procrastination.	162 59.9%	85 27.2%	41 13.1%	24 7.7%	3.23
6	I force myself to make time for planning.	134 42.9%	95 30.4%	52 16.7%	31 9.9%	3.06
7	I am spending enough time	96 30.8%	123 39.4%	56 17.9%	37 11.9%	2.58
8	I prepare a daily or weekly to do	58 18.6%	86 27.6%	96 30.8%	72 23.1%	2.42
9	I prioritise my list in order of importance not urgency.	145 46.5%	95 30.4%	42 13.5%	30 9.6%	3.14
10	I am able to meet deadlines rushing at the last minutes.	98 31.4%	96 30.8%	91 29.2%	27 8.7%	2.85
11	I keep up to date on my reading home and homework	149 47.8%	102 32.7%	40 12.8%	21 6.7%	3.21
12	I prevent interruptions from distracting me from high priority tasks.	151 48.4%	101 32.4%	34 10.9%	26 8.3%	3.21
13	I avoid spending much time on matters.	125 40.1%	117 37.5%	38 12.2%	32 10.3%	3.07
14	I am spending enough time on	162	99	37	24	3.35

	academic matters.	51.9%	31.7%	11.9%	7.7%	
15	plan time to relax and be with friends in my weekly schedules.	156 50.0%	105 33.7%	37 11.9%	24 7.7%	3.32
16	I have weekly schedule on which record fixed commitments such as class and work hours.	132 42.3%	102 32.7%	52 16.7%	26 8.3%	3.09
17	I try to do the most important during most energetic periods of the day.	145 46.5%	100 32.1	47 15.1%	20 6.4%	3.19
18	I make constructive use of my commuting time.	138 44.2%	113 36.2%	40 12.8%	21 6.7%	3.21
19	I periodically re - assess my in relation to my goals.	148 47.4%	108 34.6%	34 10.9%	22 7.1%	3.22
20	I have discontinued any wasteful unprofitable activities and	156 50.6%	103 33.0%	27 8.7%	26 8.3%	3.25
21	I screen and group my telephone to allow for control over telephone interruptions.	80 25.6%	97 31.1%	85 27.2%	50 16.0%	2.66
22	I judge myself by tasks rather than by amount of activity or “busyness”.	125 40.1%	110 35.3	45 14.4%	32 10.3%	3.05
23	My actions are determined by me, not by circumstances or by other peoples’ priorities.	123 39.4%	106 34.0%	51 16.3%	32 10.3%	3.03
24	I have a clear idea of what I accomplish during the coming semester.	162 51.9%	102 31.15	26 8.3%	22 7.1%	3.29
25	I am satisfied with the way I use time.	157 50.3%	97 31.1%	40 12.8%	18 5.8%	3.26
	AGGREGATE MEAN					3.094

Note: - 45- 50 points = Excellent, 38- 44 points = Good, 30- 37 points = Fair, 25- 29 points = stressful and less than satisfying, less than 25 points = out of control.

Research Question 1:- To what extent do ODL students in Nigeria manage time effectively.

Table 2 shows the frequencies, percentages and means of responses made by the respondents in answer to this question. The mean in all but one item is above the significant level of 2.50. The aggregate mean of 3.094 is also

significant. It implies that the extent to which the students manage their time effectively is reasonably high.

H₀. There is no significant difference in effective time management condition between male and female ODL students in Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of the Result of t-test of Independent Mean to Test Hypothesis One

Gender	No.	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-critical	P	Decision
MALE	172	46.74	8.41					
FRMALE	140	44.42	42,72	310	0.632	1.960	0.05	DO NOT REJECT Ho.

The summary of the t- test result in table 3 shows that the calculated t- value of 0.632 is less than the critical t- value of 1.960, when the degree of freedom is 310 and P =0.05. This means that the null hypothesis is not rejected. It implies that there is no significant difference in the effective time management between the male and female ODL students in Nigeria.

H₀ 2. There is no significant difference in effective time management between post- graduate and undergraduate ODL students in Nigeria.

Table4: Summary of the Result of t- test of Independent Mean to Verify Hypothesis two

Level	No	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-critical	P	Decision
POST GRADUATE	140	46.10	9.568					
UNDER GRADUATE	172	42.80	19.596	310	1.942	1.960	0.05	DO NOT REJECT Ho.

Table 4 indicates that the calculated value of t is 1.942. This is slightly less than the t- on the table which is 1.960. This means that the null hypothesis is not rejected at the degree of freedom of 310 and alpha level of 0.05. This

implies that both the undergraduate and post graduate ODL students of Nigeria have reasonably high level of effective time management condition.

Discussion

It is very interesting to find that ODL students in Nigeria have a reasonably high effective time management. This is evident from the means and aggregate means of the responses. It is also evident from the means of all the groups studied. For instance, the group mean for the male and female respondents in table 3 are 46.74 and 44.42 respectively, while post graduate and undergraduate students' means are 46.10 and 42.80 respectively. According to Wayne State University (2014), scores of 45 to 50 points are excellent and 38 to 44 points are good. It means that the level of time management condition among the ODL students in Nigeria range from good to excellent. This result confirms those of Hawking (2012) and Navratil (2009), who reported that most ODL students have high level of effective time management and therefore do well in their academic schedules.

The result of this study indicates that there is no significant difference in the effective time management conditions between the male and female ODL students on the one hand and between post graduate and undergraduate ODL students on the other hand. These findings are in line with the results of Sierra and Trapani (2015), Withmer (1015), Victoria (2014) and Dawn (2014) whose hypotheses of no significant differences were accepted. In their own investigations, Linderman (2015), Ward (2015) and Edu (2015), used alternative hypotheses, stating that male and postgraduate ODL student have higher effective time management levels than the female and undergraduate ODL students. It is also interesting to note that these hypotheses were rejected at $P= 0.05$. This means that their findings are in line with those of this study.

Conclusion

As ODL students become more and more independent in their studies they need effective time management skills in order to complete the responsibilities that are required of them daily. If they manage their time effectively they become capable of doing all the things which their hectic schedules demand with minimum stress. They will feel good about themselves and this will boost their confidence levels. For an individual to decide to become a distance learning student means that he will have entirely a new meaning of the word time. Time will have to be firmly settled in his mind for the actualisation of his studies. According to Linderman (2015), time will become his partner whether he likes it

or not. This is because time is manageable. The way an ODL student manages his time is in his hands.

From the outcome of this study, I wish to recommend that a follow up study be carried out to find out if students level of effective time management correlates with their academic achievement.

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