

Time Management and Written Assignments in Distance Education: A Set of Communicating Vessels. A Case Study in Hellenic Open University

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Abstract

Significant number of students in distance education in Greece delays the completion of their courses. In many cases, courses are interrupted, even though students have tried hard enough. The question is whether ineffective time management and lack of planning are reasons that shape such a negative situation for students. In this paper, we investigate the issue of time management of the students of the Hellenic Open University during the preparation of their written assignments. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of the postgraduate students of the H.O.U. as to the usefulness of time management in the preparation of their written assignments. Individual objectives of the work are to examine: 1) The extent to which the students of the H.O.U. use the basic principles of time management during the preparation of written assignments. 2) The perception of the students of the H.O.U. about the contribution of time management to the graded performance of written assignments. 3) The perception of H.O.U. students about training in time management issues during the preparation of written assignments. The methodological approach is the quantitative method and the data collection tool is the questionnaire with closed type questions. Our sample consists of 87 postgraduate students in the Faculty of Humanities at the H.O.U. attending the courses of Adult Education. The data analysis shows that the need for time management emerges, that proper management leads students to the active learning process, to the delimitation of learning goals and to the creative utilization of experiences that shape a creative study environment. There is a relationship of communicating vessels between time management and written assignments, since time management by students has a positive effect on

the success of their educational goals. On the contrary, the lack of time forms conditions of pressure and stress.

Keywords

Lifelong Learning, Adult Education, Time Management, Written Assignments

1. Introduction

According to Greek mythology, Saturn was the god of Time and was considered self-destructive since he “ate his own children”. Man, in trying to organize everyday life, defined and gave meaning to the concept of time. The measurement of time in seconds indicates the human need to obtain a common code of communication for matters related to time. According to [Kalu \(2012\)](#), time is an intangible energy, which, if lost, cannot be replaced or stored to be used later. For all people time is the same and for this reason, its proper management is of particular value. In this context, the concept known as time management is a complex concept, which refers to its effective use during the implementation of certain activities ([Claessens, Roe, & Rutte, 2009](#)). The connection between obligations and time was highlighted by [Orpen \(1994\)](#) who emphasized that man’s obligations can be adequately fulfilled when man utilizes time in an efficient manner. The topic of time management also occupied [Britton and Tesser \(1991\)](#), who talk about a technique that seeks to cultivate human mental abilities. [Lay and Schouwenburg \(1993\)](#) report that with the correct management of time increases the produced result and reduces work stress. [Lakein \(1973\)](#) states that a basic condition for this to happen is the definition of needs and goals in order to plan the appropriate actions that will contribute to the intended result. [Zimmerman & Paulsen \(1995\)](#) tell us time management strategies that have a positive effect: 1) The commitment, according to which the person commits to implement what is possible according to the existing conditions and his capabilities. 2) The list of activities, i.e. the recording of tasks on a sheet of paper or in an electronic calendar, makes it easier for the individual to classify his obligations and better structure the corresponding schedule. 3) Concentration, as focusing attention on the goal setting and the appropriate procedures and techniques to achieve it works as a reinforcement for learning. The correct management of time and prioritization during the educational process, according to [Darini, Pazhouhesh and Moshiri \(2011\)](#), is closely linked to the creativity of the learner and acts as a reinforcement in the conduct of the learning process. This view is reinforced by the research results of [Zampetakis, Bouranta & Moustakis \(2010\)](#) as well as by [Osburn and Mumford \(2006\)](#), who argue that planning and forecasting strategy positively affect human productivity. Furthermore, [Eerde \(2003\)](#) as well as [Häfner, Oberst and Stock \(2014\)](#) in their research, find that training in time management can significantly reduce internal anxiety and procrastination. A learner by man-

aging his available time in a correct way, achieves its creative utilization, the limitation of his learning anxiety and the upgrading of his quality of life at an individual, professional and social level (Green & Skinner, 2005).

The purpose of our research is to investigate the perceptions of the postgraduate students of the H.O.U. of the Faculty of Humanities regarding the usefulness of time management during the preparation of written assignments. The main research questions are: 1) To what extent the students of the H.O.U. do they use the basic principles of time management during writing assignments? 2) What are the perceptions of H.O.U. trainees? About the contribution that time management has to the graded performance of written assignments? 3) What are the perceptions of H.O.U. trainees about the value of training in time management issues when preparing written assignments? Through the research questions, it will become clear that time management is a serious and tormenting concern of H.O.U. postgraduate students, who during their studies try to manage the time for the preparation of their written assignments.

2. Written Assignments in Distance Education

Written assignments in distance education are a valuable teaching tool for supporting, encouraging and evaluating students and contribute to the cultivation of abilities that strengthen the function of self-management (Agiomirgianakis, Tzovani & Psiridou, 2003). By their preparation, the learners come into contact with the cognitive object, and gradually shape their learning autonomy. In the context of the reflection on the present paper, the empirical research concerning the written assignments in distance education by Olakulehin & Ojo (2008), the research by Koustourakis, Panagiotakopoulou & Lionarakis (2003), whose title is: “Investigation of Obstacles to the Implementation of Open and Distance Education and Proposals to Overcome Them”, Vassala’s (2013) research, entitled: “The ‘Laboratory for the Future’ educational technique as a tool to overcome inhibiting factors in the preparation of written assignments in distance education”, the research of Vassala & Andreadou (2009), the research of Jumani, Rahman, Iqbal, & Chisht (2011), which is entitled “Factors to improve Written Assignments in Pakistan”, as well as Patton’s (2000) empirical research, entitled: “The Importance of Being Flexible with Assignment”.

The specific researches agree that the writing of a written assignment in distance education constitutes an important pedagogical learning tool and therefore highlight the fact that the investigation of the dimension of the difficulties faced by the learners during its preparation is considered vital, since the removal of these obstacles will facilitate the learning process of the trainees. At the same time, according to the research of Koustourakis, Panagiotakopoulos & Lionarakis (2003), through the investigation of these difficulties, there will be corrective interventions, which will contribute to the qualitative improvement of studies and the prevention of difficulties for future students. Vassala & Andreadou’s (2009) research examines the value of available educational facilities (e.g. use of

the library, electronic OPAC catalog) in the preparation of written assignments. [Patton \(2000\)](#) highlights the value of flexibility in the deadline for the delivery of written work, which it is necessary for the Professor-Advisor to demonstrate, since it has a positive effect on the learning process of the trainees.

The research of [Jumani, Rahman, Iqbal, & Chisht \(2011\)](#) revealed that students find it difficult to complete written assignments due to their professional obligations and at the same time there is an overload in the study schedule. As compensation in dealing with these difficulties will be the advisory role of the Professor-Advisor, who will guide the preparation of the written work and for this reason good preparation on his part is necessary. The research of [Olakulehin & Ojo \(2008\)](#) showed that the reasons that affect the writing and completion of the written work are the difficulty of formulating the research problem, the statistical analysis of the data, the physical distance between the teacher and the student, the time required to complete the thesis, the difficulty of collecting necessary material, family problems, as well as social and professional obligations.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method & Sample

As a basic research method, we used the quantitative method, because it is a type of educational research, in which the researcher decides what to study, asks specific questions, collects measurable and observable data from the participants and then analyzes them using statistics. The survey included a random sample of 87 students of the H.O.U.'s adult education postgraduate program, who had prepared at least three written assignments during their studies, in order to have a crystallized understanding of the schedule, which should be observed until the written work is submitted to the special platform of the H.O.U. The sampling we followed is called convenience without probability as the chosen sample is the postgraduate students of the H.O.U., who attend the same postgraduate program. The advantage of this method is that we select the participants because they are willing and available to participate in the research process.

3.2. Instrument

We collected the data with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that the questions were comprehensible in order to avoid expressive ambiguities and imprecise conclusions. The anonymous questionnaire consists of 19 questions. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed by using the SPSS statistics program. For data processing, we used basic descriptive statistics and frequency distribution.

3.3. The Limitations of the Research

Due to the specificity of the study, which concerns only students of the Faculty of Humanities of the H.O.U. in a small sample, the conclusions cannot be considered directly generalizable. The survey has been conducted on the assumption

that the students have answered accurately and honestly the questions given to them about the way they manage their time. Otherwise if they had answered thinking about what would be socially desirable then the answers to the time management questionnaire would not correspond to reality.

4. Results

The results are presented and interpreted in the form of research questions.

4.1. The Views of H.O.U. Student on the Use of the Basic Principles of Time Management When Preparing Written Assignments

The first research question was to examine whether the postgraduate students of the H.O.U. use the basic principles of time management when preparing their written assignments. Almost half of the students (47.1%) said that they do some goal setting in order to define their activities as part of their written assignments, while around four in ten (39.1%) reported doing so to a greater extent. However, there were also some (3.4%) who answered that they do not enter into such a process. At the same time, approximately four out of ten (39.1%) trainees stated that they proceed to a small extent in creating a list of activities that they should carry out while setting priorities when preparing their written assignments, while approximately three out of ten (34.5%) reported that they do this to a greater extent. A smaller percentage (17.2%) answered that they proceed with this process more. Regarding planning a period of time during the day for the unexpected during the preparation of written assignments, approximately two out of ten (18.4%) said they were negative. The opinions of the students seem to be divided regarding whether they use a timetable for their daily activities while writing their assignments, as 27.6% said no, 16.1% said that they proceed in this way process to a small extent, 32.2% to a greater extent, while 24.1% to a much greater extent.

4.2. The Opinions of the Students of the H.O.U. about the Importance of the Basic Principles of Time Management in the Graded Performance of Written Assignments

Either to a lesser or to a greater extent, the students stated that they agree that proper time management contributes to their increased grade performance in written assignments. At the same time, about half (47.1%) of the trainees stated that the time set by the H.O.U. for the preparation of their assignments it is quite sufficient, while about three out of ten reported that it is quite sufficient for them (34.5%). On the other hand, very few (5.7%) answered that this time is not enough for them. About four in ten (42.5%) stated that they strongly agree with this view, while the same proportion (41.4%) indicated that they agree to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, 46% of learners strongly or strongly agreed that a good grade performance is due to good time management. The majority of trainees (50.6%) state that they strongly agree with the opinion that not attending the scheduled

meeting affects their grade performance. However, a small percentage (26.4%) responded that they somewhat agree with this view.

4.3. The Opinions of the Students of the H.O.U. on the Value of Training in Time Management Issues When Preparing Written Assignments

The results regarding whether the students feel the need to be trained in an educational institution on the issue of time management during the preparation of written assignments are noteworthy, as about half (47.1%) said no. In contrast, one in four (26.4%) reported feeling this need a little, while two in ten (20.7%) answered quite a bit. Finally, approximately half (51.7%) of the students consider a training seminar in time management quite necessary, before the start of the academic year at the H.O.U., while two out of ten (20.7%) consider it very necessary.

5. Final Remarks

The findings show that time management techniques help students achieve their learning goals and complete their written assignments on time. However, there is limited use of organization and time management techniques by students. This situation can be improved through the design of training seminars on time management, but also the development of appropriate educational material, which will highlight the importance of time management in distance education. In this context, let's always keep in mind to have a personal philosophy of time, where the reflection should be what time means and time is not money, time is life.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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