



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Management of Learning Time and Free Time Education for Students

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### **Abstract:**

Current paper presents various ways for a good time management in academic learning, having as a prerequisite that it is an abstract resource, hard to control it, but with an essential impact on student life. In general, the modern man is increasingly busy, with a gap between the number of activities he wants to accomplish and the ability to accomplish them timely, without stress. Along with passing from high school and higher education, young students find themselves in a position to restructure their way of using the time resource and also other related resources, thus becoming more organized, with an impact on the practical accomplishment of activities. In the case of academic environment, for the students involved in the educational process, the sources of stress are either at the level of learning context: people in the close group or certain teachers, the membership in several groups, the competition with the equals, the tense relations with the decision-makers, the changes at the level of the system, institution, various events in the social life, or at the level of learning activity itself: the nature of tasks, their volume, their difficulty, the existence of deadlines, the limitations, the learning conditions, the unjustified rules and habits, the ambiguity of roles, their attributions. Our analyzes highlight the internal and external causes of the non-productivity, and the application of certain solutions, techniques and tools only works in an individualized way, by applying metacognition. Planning, performing actions, checking and adjusting results are the main stages of self-management. Therefore, the study seeks to outline several efficient action principles that are useful both for learners and for trainers/guidance practitioners. Consequently, we advocate for quality leisure time education, which is currently an important axis of personal development by regenerating, compensating or developing bio-psycho-social functions.

**Keywords:** *time; students; management; learning; efficiency*

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## **Management of Learning Time and Free Time Education for Students**

### **Learning to students**

The academic learning enhances and continues the school learning, being a new behavioral acquisition process as a result of the internalization of external experience. At the level of higher education there is a maximum of the use of the learning potential, imposed both by the differences between the university education and the pre-university education, and especially by the characteristics of personality development during the youth or adulthood.

In general, the learning process stages include: A) training for learning; B) receiving and recording the material based on a background of cerebral attention; C) understanding and generalization through the formation of notions and principles; D) fixing in memory, keeping in time and storing information; E) updating by reproduction and transfer of learned elements.

The specificity of students learning is given by the development of motivation/willingness to learn independently and to control their own learning activity, starting from the assumption of objectives and tasks. But this tendency to acquire autonomy does not exclude interactive learning, the best learning experiences being integrative and collaborative developed (Suskie, 2018: 15). Then, there is the support, the constant and thorough development of study concerns and the implementation of the logical, analytical, critical thinking capacities. The status of people who choose a particular academic and professional specialization contributes to stabilize the aware, organized, responsible learning.

As a result of our own studies on the student who learn (Frăsineanu, 2014: 151), we have found that students succeed in increasing the learning efficiency if they apply a self-management learning program. In such program they practice: a) Elaboration of a personal study plan: establishment of study stages, objectives and priorities, identification of temporal, spatial, material resources; b) Applying the personal study plan; c) Capitalization on the learning led by teacher, cooperation with other students: making good notes; focusing the attention in class; empathizing with teachers and colleagues; d) Use of non-formal and informal contexts in learning; e) Capitalizing on the past experience; f) Understanding the obstacles to learning and taking steps to overcome them, identifying people who can provide support in learning and receiving advice; g) Creating a climate that encourages learning, self-motivation for and in learning; h) Determining the degree of difficulty of the material to be taught; synthesis, selection of learning material; organizing the material to be taught; definition and correct use of fundamental notions (key concepts), solving practical problems, making connections between theory and practice; i) Concentrating, maintaining attention during learning, dosing the learning effort; j) Compliance with the established deadlines; k) Self-check, knowledge of qualities and defects in learning activity; l) Training (intellectual, motivational, emotional, attitudinal) to take the exams, which involves the reduction of anxiety, the self-encouragement, the emotional self-control; m) The use of learning, by practicing the lessons learned; n) Assessing the efficacy and efficiency of the study plan and its improvement.

### **Competencies for a better (self) organization**

The competence is defined (De Ketele, cited by Manolescu, 2004) as the ability to mobilize, meaning to identify, combine and activate a set of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, to solve a family of problem situations.

The learning to students acquires the quality of being self-organized by the fact that, in the learning process, the students establish their own goals, contents, ways of learning and assessment. The self-organized learning makes the learner responsible for the use of resources and learning, detailing the actions, situations, operations, tasks, roles that he/she will accomplish. It follows the planning of learning and is continued through the self-management and self-regulation of learning.

The self-organized learners have "the capacity to realistically identify the available resources, to define their own learning goals in relation to these resources, whether the process is done naturally or is organized by institutions" (Augustein, Thomas, 1985, cited by Mamali, 1987: 66).

After Knowles (1985), the self-organization of learning is synonymous with the individual management in the field of learning projects; Candy (1991) shows that the term designates: the concern of learner to use the emerged opportunities, without institutional support, the control exercised by the learner and the personal autonomy.

In the academic learning, an important role is played by the self-regulated learning - studied among others by Zimmerman, Schunk (1989) and Winne (1995). Zimmerman (1989: 4) considered that the self-regulated learning occurs at those students who are active participants from behavioral, motivational and metacognitive point of view, in the learning process. The process of self-regulation implies the perception of the personal competence and efficiency, which interferes with the adjustment of the effort, persistence or options. The self-regulation (Bandura, 1997, cited by Negovan, 2004: 66-67) can be done by: anticipating the consequences; goals structuring; moving attention to other activities; increasing the efficiency and includes the autonomous formulation of goals, the self-assessment of performances and self-improvement of responses. It is given by the ability to set realistic goals, to select, modify, to implement strategies and tactics of action.

Thus, the self-regulation requires the self-monitoring, self-assessment, self-improvement. The self-monitoring consists in knowing the level of the understanding of information and in delivering solutions for improvement, and the self-reinforcement is learned through the awareness of the relationship between the effort and the success in achieving realistic goals, as shown Negovan (2004: 112).

An interesting model of self-regulation is the Zimmerman's cyclic model (1989), which includes: the preparatory phase (with the objectives planning, perceiving the personal efficacy and expected benefits), the performance phase (with the application of the self-learning strategies, the organization of the environment, time management), the self-reflection phase (where the self-assessment strategies, especially the assessment of the level of own satisfaction) are applied.

When analyzing the learning abilities, we shall take into account the differences between the young students and adult students. For example, the perception of time for an adult is different compared to the young people, meaning that the adults consider the investment in time as very important, while the students do not have the same perception but are more anxious. The adult's life and professional experience is larger, more diverse, organized differently, and this aspect gives him/her an advantage in learning.

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The learning competence of students results from the capitalization on the aspects involved in the management of their own learning: the regulation of planning, especially the correct, precise setting of the objectives; time allocation; rationalization in decision-making, organization of learning activities, self-assessment by reference to external criteria, but also to efficiency, efficacy, requirements-possibilities ratio. Some authors (McLoughlin, Marshall, 2000) synthesize the skills that demonstrate clearly that a student has learned how to learn: the independent planning and study; formulating goals and adjusting time to meet demands.

### **Learning Resources**

All the instruction resources, as an interaction among teaching-learning-assessment, become resources that could be used by students.

As internal resources, the psychic processes and phenomena (the perception, representation, thinking, language, memory, imagination, skills, creativity, motivation, attention, will) or the personality components (temperament, character, aptitudes) interfere with and support the learning phases, the understanding and transfer especially.

In addition to the internal resources, the learners use also external resources:

- human resources;

They are the most important. As human resources we may name the teachers, colleagues, parents, other human factors that exist in the institutionalized, academic environment or outside of it). The interactions help to capitalize on the learning abilities, support the active and interactive learning and, above all, influence the motivation of learning, sustaining the effort.

- value resources, close related to the goals of the academic study program;
- space-material resources - by that we understand the existing facilities (adequate space, temperature, lighting, ventilation, information sources, appliances, consumables, etc.), which must provide the learning conditions or a climate favorable to learning as ergonomic requirements;
- informational and content resources related to the characteristics of the material learned, the nature of the discipline;
- teaching resources (educational means) that will be methodically integrated to support learning;
- time resource.

Although the students have a high degree of autonomy when learning, we appreciate that more than being managed, the time is co-managed by setting the activities, setting certain deadlines, selecting, balancing, allocating time, creating conditions for participation by the interdependency with their teachers, other colleagues, or other people with whom they interact closely.

### **The time – abstract resource**

From an economic point of view, the time is considered a precious, pretentious, irreversible, perishable, inelastic, impersonal resource (Corodeanu, 2006).

In the field of ergonomics of learning, the indications for an efficient use of learning time refer to: the suitability to individual biorhythm and the daily curve of intellectual effort; the global analysis of the study material, the implementation of the priority tasks, the implementation of a strategy to prevent the overloading, by starting tasks timely (recommended action, by the teachers usually and sporadically done by some students), planning certain time-adequate study sessions considering the own effort capacity,

preliminary understanding of the contents, the integration of the newly learned elements in known contexts, and diversification of relaxation ways. This last action is most often used, given its natural and pleasant character, to the same extent.

The difficulties in the time planning are overcome by students by studying immediately after courses, by realistic planning of the activities during the week, by achieving a study agenda that is respected.

### **Time management arguments**

#### **I. The time management ground: reducing stress**

A poor time management is closely related to the emergence of tiredness and stress in learning, therefore, the learning time management involves hierarchies, choices between important and less important actions to maintain a balance between the learning capacity and learning outcomes.

The stress manifests itself as an imbalance of the human body, caused by its inability to deal with the demands exerted on it. It can be functional, in which case it has a motivating role, manifesting itself briefly - and dysfunctional, in the situation when it disorganizes the activity, manifesting in the long run.

The subjective nature of stress is determined by the fact that the stress is a complex psychosocial phenomenon that results from a person's confrontation with demands, tasks, situations that are perceived as difficult, painful or of great importance to the person (Băban, 2008). The reaction to stress depends on each person, because, from a psychological perspective, the stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment where the person assesses the environment as imposing demands that go beyond their own resources and threaten their well-being. This assessment triggers the copying strategies: the cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to the feedback received (Lazarus, 2001).

The sources of stress are: at the level of the context of learning: the people in the close group or certain teachers, the membership in several groups, the competition with the equals, the tense relations with the decision-makers, the changes occurring at the level of the system, institution, various events in the social life; at the level of the learning activity itself: the nature of tasks, the volume, the difficulty, the existence of deadlines, the limitations, the agglomeration of the tasks (the time crisis), the insufficiency of the learning conditions, the unjustified rules and habits, the ambiguity of the roles and so on.

Several authors such as Mintzberg, 1973; Stalk, Hout, 1990; Vinton, Kahn, Byasiere, 1992 (cited by Whetten, Cameron, 2002: 113) have indicated among the stress sources certain factors closely related to time: the overwhelming work, the loss of control.

The effects of stress are manifested by deteriorating the health; increasing coffee, sweets consumption; excessive smoking; over-feeding or decreased appetite; installing insomnia, feeling of fear; the manifestation of the isolation trend, of the sense of guilt, the inability to make decisions, to focus; the appearance of anxiety, apathy, nerve depression, aggression or irritability. The solutions in such cases come from the self-knowledge and self-acceptance, the correct perception of the reality and the others, from clarifying and defining the essential values, clarifying the future projects, organizing and monitoring their own activities, expressing assertive attitudes, using physical relaxation techniques, mental control, physical exercise.

The stress management starts with the awareness or knowledge of the sources of stress and the reactions that show its presence and reaches the action on the causes or effects by developing the assertiveness, communication, improving self-esteem, conflict

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resolution, task fulfillment, decision making, time management, application of certain relaxation techniques, the identification of an adequate social support, the development of a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

II. The reason of time management: Getting output or eliminating the unproductiveness (causes)

The time management by students helps them to establish and separate the academic tasks from those in everyday life. They achieve their goals and thus overcome the obstacles inherent in any field. Moreover, it forms a system of rational, disciplined conduct, to act successfully and in time, to capitalize on opportunities, to use control over the personal psychic, to acquire a sense of fulfillment, to evaluate the progress, and last but not least, to maintain excellent relationships in academia, family and society. However, it can not be planned all the time, because we shall accept that there are events that do not depend on us.

The efficiency, understood also as the productivity room or the performance, designates the results obtained by a student in an optimal time and under normal conditions of activity. The efficiency and rationality of a student's activity can be reported by calculating an index of learning productivity as a ratio between the dynamics of results and the dynamics of efforts or even the dynamics of learning time.

The detection of the non-productiveness in the matter of the time management is a metacognitive process. White, Frederiksen (1998, cited by Cerghit, 2002) considered the metacognition a monitor of the consciously progress, while Noel (2001) drew the attention to the necessity of realizing a realistic meta-cognition, proposing a metacognitive optimum from which the error of sub- or over-appreciation is eliminated. Schunk (1991) identifies a direct relationship between the metacognition and self-regulation, the latter being composed of: self-observation, self-judgment, self-reaction.

Moreover, the knowledge and, above all, the self-monitoring and behavioral self-regulation are necessary because they subsume to the functioning of some laws, principles and rules existing in learning (Mureşan, 1990; Neacşu, 1990, 1999, 2006): the step-by-step learning is more efficient than the merged learning; the long breaks are good for learning a difficult material, therefore, shorter breaks are recommended at the beginning and after increasingly longer; at the beginning of the learning, the yield increases and then gradually decreases; the learning time increases to a greater extent than the volume of material; after an intense learning, a state of inactivity, active rest or sleep is recommended, and if, after such learning there is another activity that poses a strong interest to the student, then the learning efficiency of the previous material decreases; in the situations of the retroactive braking, it is necessary to succeed different contents among them, using different learning methods, in order to avoid confusions.

The risks or the unproductiveness in learning time management are: the inconsistency: frequent changes of the concept and proposition of new directions; switching from one task to another; initiating multiple projects at the same time, but they are incomplete at different stages; impulsive actions, without taking into account the consequences; engaging in new tasks before finishing the old ones; unsuccessful in trying to do many things simultaneously, an inconvenience of the multitasking (Harper, 2018); inefficient strategies: the lack of planning; the concern for a great deal of documentation and for records/monitoring; the delay of actions under the pretext of the need for information; the loss of time by analyzing data to an unjustified extent; the too detailed approach, disregarding the urgency of the situation; unproductive attitudes: too much involvement in the social life and finding out about opinions; exaggerated concern about

their own social image; giving up the responsibilities; the non-critical acceptance of the new; taking too many tasks, based on an exaggerated optimism; the excessive focus on people to the detriment of the objectives; taking on learning tasks where that person has the role of rescuing the others; the inability to refuse; the non-prioritization of aid applications; the unrealistic desire to thank everyone in the absolute terms; the mistrust in sources/people who would be helpful/assessors; the negative affective states: avoiding the unpleasant topics and actions; depression because the expectations have been defeated; the excessive tiredness: when the student engages in many tasks, wishing to have the control; not requesting help; non-differentiation of tasks according to the criteria of urgency and importance.

In the above-mentioned we have shown that the causes of the poor time management or the constraints in this regard are internal, but they are also external: the unwanted visitors, the unexpected phone calls or the interruptions coming on various channels of communication, the worthless correspondence, targeted expectation, unproductive meetings, the existence of certain crisis or unnecessary demands, the lack of structure / organization by the teacher, the technical problems that can not be solved.

The principle of Pareto, theorized by Juran (Juran, Godfrey, 1999: 31), shows that not all the work is qualitative, but only 20% of it, which in the field of maximizing the learning efficiency means identifying those major factors that provide the majority of the results and eliminate 80% of the inefficient activity. It is necessary to focus on increasing the productivity rather than increasing the effort or resources; this is done by selecting the need for effort, instead of amplifying it in achieving the goals. In this case, as we have shown before, that the psychologists recommend students to perform the metacognitive and introspective activities, their own registration being possible by using diaries, worksheets, or behavioral graphs.

### **The Management modalities of time used. Effectiveness**

The effectiveness can be understood as the relationship between the efficiency and the usefulness of the activity being carried out. According to Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner, Whalley (2000), the one who learns effectively, performs planning, monitoring and reflection actions on this activity.

People who have the sense of their own efficacy address the difficult tasks as challenges, engage themselves actively, set complex goals, revise their behavior and persevere in case of failure, are internist, meaning they attribute and assume themselves the success and the failure.

At the level of the students' objectives, their achievement is influenced by their specificity, by the level of difficulty and by the proposal to achieve timely.

The time management shows that it is desirable for the learner to start with lighter subjects or contents, after that to go to the most difficult and keep to the end a pleasant one, respecting a curve of the approach, depending on the degree of difficulty; to avoid planning marathon study sessions; to set up a study program and then to communicate it to others, refusing any temptations or distractions; to monitor own use of time, use pauses, and to combine the activities.

The students can also follow some principles derived from the explanations and laws that govern learning: 1. the use of natural light hours/ periods, study in the first part of the day, but according to individual biorhythm; 2. the global analysis of the material to be taught, before reading it, studying immediately after courses; 3. determine the tasks according to the priorities; 4. start-up of the long-term tasks even before the deadline; 5.

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the realistic approach when planning activities, especially if they are unlikely to be done during the week; 6. the personal discovery of the time when he/she needs to study (for one hour in the class it would take 2 hours at home, but this time will be adjusted, plus or minus, as needed); 7. planning for long periods of time (in generally, 50 minutes of learning should be followed by 10 minutes of pause, the shorter periods can be used for making sheets, processing, organizing information, memorizing, and the longer periods for problem solving and writing); 8. develop an agenda for each study period; 9. trying to express in own words what is read, studying until it the learned content can be reproduced, before emphasizing or writing; 10. Using certain ways of diversification and relaxation, setting a special place where learning can take place, linking the material learned with the previous experience, life / daily activities and professional activity.

A simple matrix for the time planning (Covey, 1996) involves placing the activities according to the urgency and importance criteria. Thus, there are activities to be addressed in the following order: urgent and important (for example, fixed-term situations); important, but not urgent (e.g.: cultivating relationships, planning/recognizing opportunities); urgent, but not important (e.g.: interruptions, appointments, phone calls, common activities); neither urgent, nor important (e.g.: routine activities).

Considering the distribution of the activities and their approach according to the above criteria, the mentioned author considered that the efficient management means giving "priority to the priorities" (Covey, 1996: 134).

The planning and the use of the learning time by students are done during the academic semester or, more intensely, in the exams session, in different ways: by achieving a learning schedule that is respected; placing the moment of learning either in the morning or in the evening, then setting the schedule for other activities; the distribution of the learning material by quantity and difficulty criterion (a number of pages each day), adapting the deadlines to the pace of learning; building a program to avoid overloading; using an agenda, a calendar; reporting to the other daytime activities; establishing certain stages correlated with the specifics of the learning material; strict adherence to the self-proposed program; setting the priorities (during the exams session, the learning is a priority); using the moments of the maximum availability or receptivity for learning; the rhythmic daily allocation of time for learning.

The students can adapt some of the time management tools: the management by goals, matrices or spreadsheets, SWOT analysis, the Gantt Chart, the mind mapping, the assessment sheets, software, under the condition not to consume too much time, but to use for a better systematization of the activity.

### **Education for free time for students. Quality time**

Our previous analyzes converge to the idea that in learning, there is necessary time and used time. What is the spare time for students?

The student's daily time budget includes several categories of activities: personal care, meal, travel, lessons, independent learning or study, sometimes work, extracurricular individual and collective activities (sports, arts, competitions, volunteering, work in projects, associations), viewings of spectacles, films, theater, TV programs, the use of the Internet and other channels of communication, the household activities, recreational and entertainment activities, sleeping.

For the leisure time, there is no question of establishing a new organizational program, besides the one of the working time or learning, but of the self-organizing actions



and activities to which the student can participate with pleasure, depending on the interests and skills that he/she has for certain areas of the social, artistic and cultural life.

When students are employed in professional tasks, the time planning is more difficult, therefore the spare time is used for learning.

The participation in the leisure activities varies according to the lifestyles and the characteristics of the individuals (Balci, 2003, cited by Eratay, Aydoğan, 2015: 2213-2214) and the subcategories of activities or modalities are very diverse, with gender, race, economic level differences, etc., being obvious the preference of any person for actions with a character of entertainment. The same authors showed that the use of the leisure time gains significance in certain age periods. In addition to the personal benefits obtained of people from participating in the leisure activities from a social point of view, the benefits are that the respective person contributes to the development of the cultural identity and reduces his or her unsuitable or antisocial behaviors.

The quality of free time results from the achievement of the psycho-emotional balance, through choices on what students want to accomplish, determined (as a positive formulation, unlike what they do not want), but it is also useful. We understand that they choose to access wellbeing programs, focused on recreational activities, for the personal development, hobbies, sports, activities with friends etc. The change of the environment or framework is also important, whether it is an ergonomic, friendly organization of the indoor space or, more recommended going outside in nature. Active ways, which contribute to a motivational optimum, to the recovery of energy forces, and systematic desensitization to stressful situations such as are the exams, are also viable ways of spending the leisure time.

### **Conclusions**

The time management is done by: selecting the right time to study, using time (prioritization, respecting deadlines), avoiding the postponement, clear identification of the objectives, of appropriate people, applying certain adjustments of the temporal resource, allocating certain reserve time, setting up daily routines, capitalization on the moments of maximum capacity, complying with the deadlines, the resolution of important issues, even if they are unpleasant, elimination of what is unimportant, fixing of concentration periods for the situations in which a project is to be completed, grouping the activities, combining the learning with the moments of break, tackling a situation globally, providing a decanting time between planned/accomplished actions.

The stress control must be preceded by its prevention, in fact, by balanced approach of the problem of learning tasks, by acting on optimizing the capacities utilization, motivation, training, and improving the typical responses to stress, by the self-compensation, relaxation, self-suggestion.

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