

# Distance Learners' Time Management and Learning Effectiveness

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## 1. Introduction

Time management predates modern times as God Himself exhibited time management prowess at creation (Genesis chapter one of the Holy Bible). The importance of time management was equally emphasized by the Book of the Preacher i.e. Ecclesiastes in chapter three verses 1-10, where we are told that each human activity including one's birth or death has its own time. The implication of these emphases is that planning use of time, utilisation and evaluation of time which tantamount to time management would culminate in effectiveness whatever one is doing. It is this vein that Rawson in his undated ten lessons on time management emphasis listing eight priorities of daily engagements that should be carried out and follow it as religiously, evaluate how feasible it was to carry out in the day, giving the time allotted to executing each of the listed priorities. He further stated that if it failed try again and again until one gets it right. This, by implication, means that through constant practice of time management one would become a master of it. Furthermore, it should be noted that time as implied from the above observations required discipline which comes from deliberate decision to foregone substantial amount of pleasure, in order to gain knowledge or dexterity in one's field of human endeavour.

Distance learning mode of study can be seen as alternative mode of education that offers a second opportunity of education for those who could have perpetually missed the chance of being educated [Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2004)]. Distance learning enables a learner to gain access to acquire education without the pain of having to forfeit the opportunity of retaining their jobs. Thus, the learners at a distance who is physically separated from his/her teacher would now have to share his/her available time everyday among various contending daily engagements for the use of his/her twenty-four hours. This calls for systematic and deliberate planning and subsequent prudent use of the time available to him/her. This process is amount to time management. According to Rawson (undated), the essence of time management is to be effective in whatever one does.

The effectiveness of someone in any area of human endeavour is measured by the level of accomplishment or achievement in that area or discipline. The effectiveness of the learner cannot but be measured in any other way except in terms of his/her degree of achievement in the field. It is a well known fact that achievement is not only a function of instruction/teaching

but also a function of a number of several other factors including but not limited to time management, home and school environments, school management among other factors (Durowoju 2010; Durowoju, Onuka and Onabamiro, 2010). Therefore, this study determined how time management affected the study/learning effectiveness of the distance learner and how she/he can be assisted to effectively manage his/her twenty-four hours in order to effectively study without being disadvantaged and earn degrees that they can truly claim to have earned. In other words, in the study, the relationship between time management and the distance learner study effectiveness [DLSE] was determined as well as the ways in which the learners' time management skills can be improved.

Arising from the foregoing, the paper addressed the following two questions:

1. What is the relationship between the distance learners' time management and their learning effectiveness?
2. How could their time management skills can be improved for learning effectiveness?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research procedure**

This investigation, which is a pilot study on distance learners' time management, was carried out ex-post facto. This procedure was used because according to Kerlinger and Lee (2000), ex-post facto is the best approach to gathering data whose events had occurred as in this study.

### **2.2 Population**

The population was made of distance learners in the learning programmes of three Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria namely: University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, University of Ibadan, Ibadan and the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

### **2.3 Sampling procedure and sample**

The sampling procedure for selecting the participants for this study was purposive sampling technique. This is because randomization was not possible as the learners come to the sites of the programmes only to collect text and other learning materials and for contact sessions, hence, subjects were purposively chosen from among distance learners in the Faculties of Education of these universities, as education has the largest participants in distance learning programmes of universities in Nigeria. Therefore, 40, 30 and 30 participants were respectively selected from Ibadan, Lagos and Ile-Ife. The participants in the study were those who have had at least three contact sessions and written examinations three times at three different levels.

### **2.4 Instrumentation**

A nine-item time management checklist (Pro-forma) developed and validated by the researcher using the content validity index computation formula given by Content Validity Index as espoused by Amin (2005) as Content Validity Index (CVI) = the total number judges minus the number of judges declaring an item valid over total number of judges  $[n - n_i / n]$ , where  $n$  is total of judges,  $n_i$  is number of judges declaring an item valid], which yielded

an aggregate validity coefficient of 0.821 [the aggregate CVIs of the nine items]. This index was obtained by giving ten colleagues to ascertain the content validity of the time management model or checklist. The instrument was again to another set of 10 experts to ascertain the content validity; the outcome was then subjected to computation of the more complex Content Validity Ratio (CVR) formula (Lawshe, 1975) as related in Cohen and Swerdik (1999). This yielded an aggregate content validity ratio of 0.782. The formula is given as Content Validity Ratio [CVR] = number of experts indicating an item as essential minus total number of judges divided by two over total number of judges divided by two, i.e.

$$n_e - n/2$$

$$n/2,$$

where n is the total number of experts,  $n_e$  is number of experts regarding the item as essential]. This instrument was divided into nine broad daily and learning-related tasks, in which the learners may have to engage on daily basis, and to which they are to allocate time out of twenty-four hours of the day. The instrument was a product of the aggregation of the typical daily activities as indicated by 90 pre-research sampled distance learners from a non-participating university distance learning programme, who were requested to write down twelve things they normally do each day of the week. It was from the collation of the information given by them that the model/instrument model shown below was designed by this researcher. The items included in the instrument were those activities that were indicated by at least 70% of the 90 learners [at least 63 distance learners]. The instrument was further administer on a similar sample outside of the participants in the study twice at a week interval and its reliability determined using Pearson's Product Moment correlation through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS]. This process yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.92.

The specimen of the instrument is as shown in the table A below:

S/No of Task	Task	Time Allotment in hours for all the participants	Average Time Allotment in hours	Time used as % of 24hrs
1	Sleep			
2	General preparation for the day			
3	Interaction with ICT in relation to learning			
4	Social activities			
5	Home activities			
6	Learning activities			
7	Work activities			
8	Leisure			
9	Others			

Source: Time Management Model/checklist was designed by this Researcher for purpose of this study which could be adopted or adapted for future study

Table A. Specimen of Time- Management Model.

There was also a Focus Group Discussion Schedule on improving the distance learner's time management for effective study/learning effectiveness based on the content of the model/checklist.

Study effectiveness was determined by collating the Cumulative General Point Averages of the subjects used in the study and applied in the computation of correlation of effectiveness in relation to time management.

The subjects were grouped into 5 groups of eight persons each in the University of Ibadan and 5 groups of six persons each in University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University respectively as focus group discussion [FGDs]. Each group was asked to discuss how they can manage their time with regard to their schedules vis-vis their study.

## 2.5 Procedure for data collection

The instrument was administered on the 100 hundred participants chosen for the study from the three distance learning programmes in three universities in the South-West, Nigeria as aforementioned. The one hundred distance learners/participants of three Nigerian university distance learning programmes (University of Ibadan [40], University of Lagos [30] and the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife [30]) were asked to analyse how they plan, organize and utilize their whole time taking cognizance of their whole day undertakings using the instrument/model provided for the study by the researcher. This was after a series of three lectures each on effective time management to each of the three groups at different times during their contact sessions at the three universities, to enable them to understand and to grasp the import of time-management in effective self-motivated/directed learning and to help them carry out the analysis of how they were managing their time in relation to their study habits with the benefit of hindsight, insight and with foresight, endeavour to improve on their study habit vis-à-vis their time schedule for study and other necessary daily engagements. The instrument was administered on the sample from each of the three programmes to enable them assess how they have been planning, budgeting, organizing and implementing their all day time vis-à-vis their daily task including sleep and all preparations for the tasks. Daily time management schedule of each group was computed. The participants were requested to rate their study effectiveness which were cross checked by scrutinizing and using their past results to correlate their time-management assessment, the ratings in percentage were aggregated and the mean in percentage for each group was again put against the daily mean (i.e. typical day) as depicted by the results through the instrument. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher during their (learners) contact sessions. The instrument doubles as the distance time management model.

The learners were also grouped into five focus discussions (FGDs) for each of the three ODL programmes by constituting for Ibadan and five panels of six each respectively for each of Lagos and Ife, using the FGD schedule on improving the distance learner's time management for study effectiveness whose responses denominated in percentages to collate/analyse how time can be effectively managed for study or learning effectiveness. In the focus group discussions the members of the panel freely discuss each item of the FGD schedule which recorded and later was transcribed and coded in percentages to come out with a recommended time management model/checklist.

## 2.6 Data analysis

The resulting data from the research exercise were analyzed using percentages while the Pearson's Product Moment correlation statistic was also used to determine the relationship between time management and study effectiveness of the distance learner using the SPSS. The opinions of the participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), on how to improve learners' time management and the concomitant study effectiveness were analysed using percentages.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1 Results

From the below table, the average time the participants from the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre daily spent on different major activities such as Sleep is a quarter of a day, work-related activities and learning related activities take a total of 1/6 of their daily activities. The rest of the day is shared among all other activities.

S/No of Task	Task	Time Allotment in hours for all the participants	Average Time Allotment in hours	Time used as % of 24hrs
1	Sleep	240	6.0	25
2	General preparation for the day	60	1.5	6.25
3	Interaction with ICT in relation to learning	80	2.0*	8.34
4	Social activities	40	1.0	4.17
5	Home activities	100	2.5	10.42
6	Learning activities	80	2.0*	8.34
7	Work activities	320	8.0	33.33
8	Leisure	40	1.0	4.17
9	Others	20	0.5	2.08

Table 1a. Time management schedule of University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre.

The correlation between University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre Learners' time management and their learning effectiveness is shown in table 1b below:

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Average time spent with ICT	40	2.0	0.34	0.94	0.00
Learning activities	40	2.0	0.32		

Table 1b. Correlation between average time spent on learning-related activities among U.I. Distance Learners' study effectiveness.

This table shows that there is a very high positive relationship between University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre [UIDLC] participants' time-management and their learning

effectiveness. The implication of this finding is the effective time-management by distance learner in UIDLC results in learning effectiveness of the learners.

S/No of Task	Task	Time Allotment in hours for all the participants	Average Time Allotment in hours	Time used as % of 24hrs
1	Sleep	180	6.0	25.0
2	Preparation for the day	60	2.0	8.34
3	Interaction with ICT in relation to learning	45	1.5	6.25
4	Social activities	30	1.0	4.17
5	Home activities	60	2.0	8.34
6	Learning activities	45	1.5	6.25
7	Work activities	255	8.5	33.33
8	Leisure	30	1.0	4.17
9	Others	15	0.5	2.17

Table 2a. Time Management Schedule of University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute Participants.

From the above table, the average time the participants of University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute daily spent on different major activities are [a quarter of a day] on sleep, a half an hour more than Ibadan participants spent on work-related activities and an hour less than the time those of Ibadan spent learning related activities.

The correlation between time spent on ICT and learning activities is shown in the table below:

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Average time spent with ICT	30	1.0	0.26	0.76	0.00
Learning activities	30	3.0	0.81		

Table 2b. Correlation between average time spent on learning related activities by Learners at University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute and their learning effectiveness.

This table shows that though relationship between time management and study effectiveness at the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute is quite high at 0.76, yet it falls below what obtained in Ibadan. This implies that time management by the learners at Lagos still results in some high level learning effectiveness of participants.

From the below table, the average time by the participants at Obafemi Awolowo University Centre for Distance Learning Centre daily spent on different major activities are as follows: 6hrs {25% of a day}, 8 hrs on work related activities, the same as in UI and the same amount of time on learning-related activities [4hrs in all] as in Ibadan.

S/No of Task	Task	Time Allotment in hours for all the participants	Average Time Allotment in hours	Time used as % of 24hrs
1	Sleep	210	7.0	29.17
2	Preparation for the day	45	1.5	6.25
3	Interaction with ICT in relation to learning	30	1.0	4.17
4	Social activities	30	1.0	4.17
5	Home activities	75	2.5	10.42
6	Learning activities	90	3.0	12.5
7	Work activities	240	8.0	33.33
8	Leisure	15	0.5	2.08
9	Others	15	0.5	2.08

Table 3a. Time Management Schedule by Learners at the Obafemi Awolowo University Centre for Distance Learning.

The correlation between time management and learning effectiveness of the learners is shown in table 3b below:

Variables	N	Mean	sd	r	Sig
Average time spent with ICT	30	1.5	0.43	0.85	0.00
Learning activities	30	1.5	0.42		

Table 3b. Correlation between time management and learning effectiveness OAU Distance Learners.

Table 3b shows that relationship between time management by OAU learners and their study effectiveness is also very high correlation at r-value = 0.85. This result shows very high positive correlation between effective time management and study effectiveness at Ife.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Time management and learning effectiveness

The results from this study show that the differences in time-management ability or level of application of time-management are a function of location and the degree of business attached to the location. Amount of time available seem to possess inverse relation with level of industrial and commercial activities associated with a particular location. For instance, in Lagos that is the busiest city in the West African sub-region, the participants were only able to spare a total of three hours to learning and learning-related activities giving only 3hrs of 24hrs [12.5%] of a whole day or typical day. Whereas in Ibadan, a less busy city and less traffic congested city more time was available to distance learner for undertaking learning daily: a total of four hours was devoted to the same quantum of

learning activities giving 16.68% as opposed to the 12.5% of the day giving to learning by Lagos participants. However, it proves almost true that the levels of business and industrial activities as well as that of traffic congestion are less than those of Lagos, when it came to the turn of Ile-Ife which is the least busy of the three cities, as its participants devoted almost the same quantum of time to learning and learning-related activities as did Ibadan, though not in the same degree between pure learning activities and learning-related activities on Information and Communication Technologies. While Ibadan share its four hours on equal basis between the two, Ife does its own in a disproportionate manner, due its '*ruralness*' possibly because of the fact that the Ibadan participants who are not as busy as Lagos participants had more access to the use of these technologies than Ife, but took advantage that it was less busy than Lagos to access ICT facilities more and utilize them. Consequently, the study/learning effectiveness shown by the study revealed that the Ibadan participants had the highest level of study effectiveness of 96%, followed by Ife participants who though allocated more time to real learning activities, but could as much keep abreast of global development in their fields of study because of the quantum of time they gave ICT activities. Thus, they nonetheless came second in study effectiveness with 85%, with Lagos participants bringing up the rear both in terms time management effectiveness and study/learning effectiveness with 76% study effectiveness as perceived by its participants. The difference in the correlation between Ibadan participants and Ife participants could due to the degree of programme organisation and perhaps the fact that Ibadan has more relevant facilities than Ife, while the busy nature and high level of traffic congestion rip off any good impact available relevant facilities as the combined effect of the busy nature and traffic congestion neutralize the impact of possible access to good facilities One can easily notice that chunk of the learner's time is spent at work, a thing they do not have control over as the case is with sleep, both of which together have between them something in neighbourhood of 58.33-62.5% of the total daily time spent on them.

These findings confirm the findings of Ogunsanya and Agu (1990), Onuka, Onyene and Junaid (2008) and Onuka (2010) respectively that effective time management, which involves estimating the time each task requires to be effectively undertaken, planning it, budgeting, organizing and implementing as well as evaluating in order to revise it for possible on it, would normally result effectiveness in handling the activities or getting the expected results; and that effective time management calls for sacrifice or what could be termed 'opportunity cost' with regard to some activities that must be forgone for time management effectiveness and accomplishment of expected outcome. The findings are also in consonance with the finding of Junaid (2010) that effective management of a distance learning programme among other factors can result in appropriate programme outcome. By implication, if Nigerian university distance learning outfits are to be kept afloat, they must necessarily inculcate the spirit of time management in their learners (cliente). The correlations between time management and their study effectiveness show that the more effective the learners were able to manage their time, the more they were effective in their study, which goes to support the fact that effective time management can engender effective study habit (Onuka et al, 2008). The outcome also confirm the view and finding of Rawson [undated] and Mokuolu [2007] that prioritizing one's daily activities assists the individual manage his time manage very well in order to become effective in his activities or undertaking. The findings therefore, imply that effective time management is a product of



effective prioritization of one's daily undertakings, while effective management in turn produces dexterity in the worker/learner, thereby leading to learning or work effectiveness.

#### **4.2 Improving the distance learners' time management effectiveness**

On how to improve the learners' time-management skills, the participants in the groups proffer that as part of orientation programme for participants of Nigerian university distance learning programmes, time management should be taught to the participants both textually and electronically. This, they opined would enable them to understand the need to manage their time vis-à-vis their daily tasks including the schedule for the study, as such would motivate them to daily have some time out of their daily schedule. This development, according to them will assist to become effective distance learners, as they confess that quite often they have had no regular time table for daily engagement in learning, unless when they receive notification on contact sessions and/or examination schedule. They averred that lack of time-management skills had hindered hitherto from effective learning as they were not able to manage task time effectively and as such were less effective in their learning styles and the concomitant learning/study effectiveness. There were no differences in opinion about these results by the participants from the three programmes. This is perhaps so, because in Nigeria, educational programmes by similar institutions are run in the same manner particularly the distance learning programmes (Junaid, 2010). The participants also felt that if they have had personal advisors assigned to guide each of them, they would have realized the enormity of the tasks ahead and thus evolve a time-management spirit which (Rawson, undated; Ogunsanya and Agu, 1990) stated was essential to effectiveness whatever area of human endeavours one is engaged. These views by the respondents also conform to the observation of (Onuka, 2010; White, 1998; Mokuolu, 2007) that time-management skills are not in-born but are acquired through either training or constant observation of the activities of a 'trained' or practicing time manager, because as he said time is about the only resource that has been equitably distributed among humans of all races, creed or climes. This also confirms Rawson's [undated] implied view that effective time management requires high level of self-discipline which, of course results from sacrifice of certain not very essential things that the economist would refer to as opportunity for time management effectiveness. Thus, individual must decide to profitably use his or her time. This implies making sacrifice of activities that may be essential but not expedient or necessary.

The study, therefore, evolved the following model for distance learners' time management schedule for strict observance during their course of study in order to improve time management prowess of the distance learner to engender his/her learning effectiveness.

Synthesising the above, the study evolved a model time-management for the effectiveness of the learner in South-West, Nigeria and other parts of the country because the much similarities in work hours and endeavours especially in respects of social engagements, and other habits. Nothing anyone can do about the working hours, hence the nine hours allotted for work, medically, 6 hours would be sufficient for an adult and our population is an adult one. It is expected that as education is investment and investment is the sacrifice made today for tomorrow's enjoyment or gain, hence the one hour so allotted to it. Thus, social activities must be minimized. Thus, the effective distance time management model is given

by  $S + Gp + Ct + Sa + Ha + La + Wa + Lt + Th$  or *The linear equation for DLSE can be as a function of effective time management given by*  $[DLSE = f(24 S -Gp -Sa -Ha -Lt -Wa -Th)]$ , {Where S (sleep) [6]; Gp (General preparation) [1]; Ct (Interaction with ICT) [ $1\frac{1}{2}$ ]; Sa (Social activities) [ $1\frac{1}{2}$ ]; Ha (Home activities) [2]; La (Learning activities) [3]; Wa (Work place activities) [9]; Lt (Leisure time) [ $1\frac{1}{2}$ ]; Th (Others) [ $1\frac{1}{2}$ ]}. Alternatively the model can be represented as follows: *DLSE (i.e. Distance Learner Study Effectiveness) =  $24 -S -Gp -Sa -Ha -Lt -Wa -Th$* . The figures in parenthesis [] shows the recommended time for the activity after which they appear. The recommended aggregate daily study time [including learning related activities] apart from total daily time allocated to non-learning activities in our suggested is  $1\frac{1}{2}+3 = 4\frac{1}{2}$  giving 27 hours a week while providing one any day of the week is utilized for rest all through. However, the distance learner decides how s/he uses the rest of Saturday when he might not be at workplace.

Task	Time Allocated to Task	Percentage of 24 Hours
Sleep	6 hours	25%
General preparation for the day	1 hour	4.2%
Interaction with ICT in relation to learning	1 hour 30 minutes	6.2%
Social activities	30 minutes	2.1%
Home activities	2 hours	8.3%
Learning activities	3 hours	12.5%
Work activities	9 hours	37.5%
Leisure time	30 minutes	2.1%
Others	30 minutes	2.1%
Total	24 hours	100%

Table 4. Recommended Daily Time- Management Model for Effective Distance Learning.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

It is obvious that Open/distance learning mode has become an acceptable means of providing access to higher education in this twenty-first century. In Nigeria, where there have been constant shortfall between demanded spaces in higher education institutions and the supply therefrom, and where public and private university-based distance learning programmes are self-sustaining, all such programmes must endeavour to ensure that its outputs are quality products comparable to what the formal university system outputs. The best way of so assuring this phenomenon is by inculcating the spirit of time management in its learners at the beginning of their enrolment into their various programmes, because the learners are expected to do at least 75% of their study/learning by themselves on their own by means of self-regulation, to enable them to do effective time-tabling to guide them in their individual study efforts. Since it is invariably very clear that time-management skills need to be taught, as it can only be acquired through learning and by constant observation

of the practical time manager exhibiting his skills in the way he organizes and executes his tasks promptly and profitably. With this done the programmes can then be assured of ever-expanding clientele and perpetual self-sustenance. A recommended time-management model has been evolved for the distance learner for effective learning from this study, which he/she can adjust to suit his/her own purpose-appropriate feasible time- schedule and execution [management]. This obviously involves self-discipline resulting deliberate sacrifice of certain not too essential activities and putting off those that can be put on hold for future time and deliberately using the saved time from such sacrificed activities profitably in one's field of human endeavour, which in this case is open/distance learning.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Therefore, the following recommendations are hereby made for the consideration:

- That Nigerian university-based distance learning programmes should as a matter of necessity, organize annual time-management orientation course for their new entrants and also on study habit;
- That consideration should be given to the nature of location in order to absorb any externalities resulting therefrom in the time management process for study effectiveness;
- That programme advisor/counsellor should be assigned to each distance learner for the purpose of guidance particularly in terms of use of available time among seemingly competing needs, so that he can learn to effectively manage his time both effectively and efficiently, thereby engaging himself/herself in effective learning;
- That distance learners must learn to forgo some essential activities that may not be necessarily expedient, in which case, the learner must learn to prioritize their daily activities and forgo those found not expedient, to enable them devote substantial time to their self-regulated learning activities including those that can be mostly acquired using ICT facilities;
- Learners should be disciplined by deliberately sacrificing substantial amount of their social activities are often not that essential as well as other not too essential activities which could inhibit their learning activities by following their own time management schedule religiously for study effectiveness; and
- That learners should adopt the following time management model for learning effectiveness: the effective distance time management model is given by effective learning time management =  $La + Ct$ . Alternatively the model can be represented as follows: *DLSE (i.e. Distance Learner Study Effectiveness) =  $24 - S - Gp - Sa - Ha - Lt - Wa - Th = La + Ct$*  {Where S (sleep); Gp (General preparation); Ct (Interaction with ICT); Sa (Social activities); Ha (Home activities); La (Learning activities); (Wa (Work place activities); Lt (Leisure time); Th (Others)]. This can be mathematically expressed as *DLSE can be as a function of effective time management given by  $[DLSE = f(24 S - Gp - Sa - Ha - Lt - Wa - Th)]$ .*

## 6. Brief on the researcher

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The time management is worthy goal of many human activities. It concerns variety problems related to goals definition, assessment of available resources, control of management policies, scheduling of decisions. This book is an attempt to illustrate the decision making process in time management for different success stories, which can be used as reference models by the interested audience.

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