Time Management Skills of Summer Students: the Case of EFL Learners at AAU

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Abstract: The main aim of this study was to examine the time management skills of summer students in the English Department of Addis Ababa University. It targeted examining the effectiveness of the time management skills of the students focusing on their goal setting, prioritizing, managing interruption, beating procrastination and scheduling. To this end, the researcher took 80 2nd year students from the Department of English who took the course Academic Writing Skills (EnLa 303) with him in the 2009/10 academic year. The researcher adopted the questionnaire developed by Mind Tools Ltd. (1995) to measure the effectiveness of the time management skills of individuals. It had 15 items that focused on goal setting, prioritization, managing interruptions, beating procrastination, and scheduling activities. The subjects were asked to respond on a five point scale. Then, each student's score in these main areas was calculated using the Mind Tools Ltd soft program. However, their responses were categorized and aggregate responses were used for analysis. The findings showed that only slightly more than half of the students (53.75%) had effective time management practices, which actually did not indicate whether all these students were 'good' in all aspects of the time management skills, or not. The results of the study, for example, showed that only (6.25%) of the target students were 'good' at setting goals. The study revealed that there were also quite a number of students who did not set goals for their studies, nor scheduled, nor prioritized their daily academic and other social activities, and thus they often faced unexpected interruptions and procrastinations.

Introduction

Prior to college life, students often may not worry much about effective use of time since they are less challenged by academic pressures. The situation often changes in the otherwise much more competitive colleges where many who did well in high school may receive lower grades such as D's and F's. In college those who receive

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lower grades are not necessary less capable than those who receive higher grades. Their time management may simply be inefficient.

Scholars indicate that there is close correlation between time management skills and students' academic achievements. According to Campbell and Svenson (1992), effective time management strategies increase academic performance and are frequently suggested by academic assistance personnel as aids to enhance achievement for college students. Similarly, Entwistle and Ramsden (1983); Kirschenbaum and Perri (1982) say that productive study methods are characterized by effective time management and strategic studying. Moreover, Brown (1991) says that students who do not start large tasks well before due dates, do not break down large tasks into small ones, and do not do small tasks on a regular schedule and hence find themselves in great distress before exams. Relevantly Swick (1987) also says that many college students may find academic experiences very stressful because of their poor scheduling and time management skills. Not altogether surprisingly, one potential coping strategy frequently offered by university counseling services to offset the poor performance effect of inefficient time use is time management training (Macan et al, 1990).

Studies conducted continue to show that there is a direct relationship between students' time management skills and their academic achievements. For example, Macan et al (1990) studied the time management behaviors and attitudes, stress, and self-perceptions of performance and grade point average of one hundred and sixty-five students, and concluded that those who perceived control of their time reported significantly higher evaluations of their performance, greater work and life satisfaction, less role ambiguity and less role overload.

Similarly, Trueman and Harkly (1996) examined the scores obtained from 293 first-year students of psychology using a British version of an American time-management scale. Though their study focused on comparing the time-management skills of male and female students, it also examined students' academic performance and their time management skills. Their findings showed that students who manage their time effectively, regardless of their age and sex, have good academic records.

Moreover, de Meulemeester et al (1996) examined time use patterns and variables related to time use, including feelings about time use, time management, and academic achievement of one hundred and six male and female occupational therapy students enrolled at Worcester State College in Worcester. They gathered data from the students using a questionnaire on their time use (activities engaged in during a typical 24-hours period), and feelings about time use (related to competence, value, enjoyment) for the activities they reported. In addition, the students were made to complete the Time Management Questionnaire (Britton and Tesser, 1991), which measured their time attitudes, preferences for short range planning and for long range planning. The results of the study suggest that the use of time management may be related to academic achievement. The generality of studies imply that students who score good grades at colleges are more likely those who manage their time effectively.

The present researcher noticed that his summer EFL students (2009/10 academic year) usually complained about shortage of time whenever they were given assignments. He also realized that the students produced poor and disorganized written pieces. The culprit they would say was time constraints. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine, assisted by the literature, whether indeed the time management skills of students are inadequate.

Theoretical Framework

Time Management as Concept

The literature on time management tells us that it is not easy to define the concept of time management, which is attributed to different factors. The first factor that makes it difficult to define the concept of time management is its broadness.   Time management is a big subject that covers many different areas from planning day-to-day activities to setting long term goals. Often the concept is associated with planning, prioritizing, goal setting, scheduling, and managing activities or tasks. Also, time management refers to a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects, and goals which include a wide range of activities such as planning, allocating, setting, goals, analyzing time

spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling and prioritizing. Further, conceptually time management includes activities from planning personal activities to designing time for huge projects.

As a result of these factors which demonstrate that time management is a rather profuse construct, varieties of terms are used in dealing with issues related to time management. Fore example, the following phrases are common in the time management literature: 'Beating Procrastination', 'Find Out How You Really Spend Your Time', 'Goal Setting', 'Effective Scheduling', 'Get Organized', 'Protect Your Time', 'Work in Priority Order', 'Use Magical Tools to Get More Out of Your Time', 'Master the Skills of Time Management', 'Recover from Bad Time Habits', etc. Therefore, research on the effective use of time has generated several terms, which has made it difficult to define precisely the concept of time management.

Similarly, literature on time management issues related to schooling activities has yielded different terms among which 'Available Time', 'Allocated Time', 'Engaged Time', 'Academic Learning Time (or ALT)', 'Pacing', 'Transition Time', and "Instructional Time' are the common ones. (We will see the first four of these terms in detail later on in this study). Time management is not unidimensional.

In fact research has reported evidence for the multidimensional nature of the construct (Britton and Tesser, 1991; Macan and others, 1990). Therefore, an attempt to review the numerous definitions given to the concept of time management is unwise effort from the point of view and scope of this article. Thus, the concept of time management used in this paper refers to the abilities of students to recognize and solve their personal time management problems which enable them to control their time and study life that reduce their stress and make them successful in their studies. In other words, it refers to their ability to maintain balance between their study (attending classes, doing assignment/homework, and reading), and personal and social lives (visiting friends, attending social affairs, or recreation).

Time Management Terms in Schooling

Available Time

Available time refers to the time allocated for the teaching-learning activities in the courses that students take. Available time is limited by the number of days that students stay on the campus each year. It is expected that summer-students attend classes for eight weeks. According to this, they stay on campus for 56 days (8 weeks x 7 days = 56 days). Available time also refers to the number of contact hours (class time). Summer-students taking 15 credit hours attend classes on average for five hours in a day, including 1:40 hours of break time from Monday to Saturday. Moreover, available time is divided among all the diverse functions of a college/school, including the recreational, social, and academic activities that form the mandated and the hidden curriculum present in every college/school district. Therefore, students are expected to know the available time they have during the summer courses, and use it properly.

Allocated Time

Allocated time is the amount of time assigned for the instruction of each course, without reference to the quality of the activities being conducted during that time. In allocating time to a specific course, one must consider how the time is allocated as well as the total time set aside for the class. The amount of time and the way it is distributed during the day, week, and the summer are issues related to allocated time. In the context of the target group for this study, each of the five courses that students took in the 2009/10 academic year was given six hours in a week. Therefore, each course is allocated 48 hours (8 weeks x 6 hours) the semester.

Engaged Time

Engaged time refers to the amount of time the student is actively involved in, in such learning tasks as writing, listening, and responding to teacher questions. Engaged time does not include classroom tasks such as handing in a paper or waiting for a teacher to pass out materials, or inappropriate activities such as disruptive talking to

another student or daydreaming. Research indicates that it is very difficult to specify the engaged time of each activity since it varies from student to student. Therefore, engaged time is not considered in this study.

Academic Learning Time (ALT)

Academic learning time has been defined as time spent by a student engaged on a task in which few errors are produced and where the task is directly relevant to an academic outcome (Romberg, 1980). The concept of ALT represents a considerable refinement over engaged time.

Romberg noted that ALT is positively correlated with achievement, whereas time unsuccessfully engaged in academic tasks is negatively related to student achievement.

In order to determine which tasks were directly relevant to an academic outcome, ALT researchers emphasized correspondence between the tasks and the tests that would be used to measure student achievement.

ALT is complex, because one has to combine the assessment of the time-on-task with measures of success and measures of the appropriateness of the learning tasks. The ALT notion of success in the engaged tasks represents a major refinement of the concept of engaged time. Marliave and Filby (1985) noted that "student success during instructional tasks is an ongoing learning behavior of equal or greater importance than that of time allocated to criterion- relevant tasks or student attention during those tasks" (p. 222).

Procrastination and the Need to Manage Time in Colleges

Time management begins with the use of schedule with daily lists and taking time to write down everything one does. If a student sleeps seven hours a night, he has 119 hours a week to do everything that he needs to do, which includes everything from going to class, eating, athletic events, social activities, personal hygiene, time-in-transit, studying, student organizations, and telephone and television time, and

everything in between. This array of activities suggests that the student has to schedule what he does in all 119 hours a week and should stick to the schedule.

Students who do not manage their time wisely procrastinate, and are thus overwhelmed by the tasks they do. As a result, they keep putting off their academic assignments for a later date, spending a great deal of time with their friends and social activities, or worrying about their upcoming examination, class project, and papers, rather than completing them.

Students also procrastinate because they have difficulty concentrating. When they sit at their desks, instead of doing their tasks, they find themselves daydreaming, staring into space, looking at pictures of their friends, etc. Their environment is distracting and noisy- they keep running back and forth for equipment such as pencils, erasers, dictionary, etc. Their desks are cluttered and unorganized and sometimes they sit/lie on their beds to study or do their assignments. They probably notice that all of the examples that they have just read promote time wasting and frustration.

In addition, students procrastinate because of fear and anxiety. They may be overwhelmed with the tasks and afraid of getting a failing grade. As a result, they spend a great deal of time worrying about their upcoming exams, papers and projects, rather than completing them.

Furthermore, students procrastinate because they have negative beliefs such as: "I cannot succeed in anything" and "I lack the necessary skills to perform the task," which may allow them to stop themselves from getting work done.

Students also procrastinate because of personal problems, finding the task boring, fear of failure, and unrealistic expectations and perfectionism.

For individual tasks or for goals, an importance rating may be established, deadlines may be set, and priorities may be assigned. This process results in a plan with a task list or a schedule or calendar of activities. Authors may recommend a daily, weekly, monthly or other planning periods; usually fixed, but sometimes variable. Different planning periods may be associated with different scope of planning or review.

Routine and recurring tasks may or may not be integrated into the time management plan and, if integrated, the integration can be accomplished in various ways.

Borg (1980), in his summary of the research on the relationship between time and school earning, states that "The amount of time that students are engaged in relevant reading and mathematics tasks is positively associated with academic achievement" (p. 59).

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to examine the time management skills of summer students at Addis Ababa University taking the case of 2ⁿᵈ year EFL students taking Academic Writing Skills (EnLa 303) in the 2009/10 academic calendar. Thus, it tried to:

- examine the overall effectiveness of their time management skills;
- see their skills in goal setting for their studies;
- investigate effectiveness of their practices in setting priorities for daily activities;
- study effectiveness of their skills in managing interruptions;
- examine their skills of overcoming procrastination, and
- find out their practices in scheduling their daily activities.

Scope of the Study

Being a case study, this study limits itself to examining the time management skills of the sample of 2ⁿᵈ year summer students in the Department of English, Addis Ababa University. Thus, it does not include either the time management skills of all the students in the Department across years, or the time management skills of all the summer students in other departments in the 2009/10 academic year.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused only on examining the aggregate time management skills of the target learners. It did not see the relationships between individual time management skills and individual academic performances. It also did not consider sex as well as age factors in relation to time management skills. Thus, it limited itself only to investigating whether the learners planned their daily activities during their stays for eight weeks on campus, and examined the effectiveness of their time management skills.

Methodology

This study aimed to see the time management skills of 80 second year summer students taking the course titled *Academic Writing Skills (EnLa 303)* in the Department of English in the 2009/10 academic year. It was basically a case survey study. The researcher took all the students taking the course with him as data sources. He examined the effectiveness of the time management skills the students based on their responses to the questionnaire they filled in.

The questionnaire that was used for gathering data was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Mind Tools Ltd. in 1995 to measure the effectiveness of the time management skills of individuals. The questionnaire had 15 items that focused on goal setting, prioritization, managing interruptions, beating procrastination, and scheduling activities. Each student was asked to tick as appropriate to him/her against each item in the questionnaire using a five scale ranking that ranged from 'Not at all' to 'Very often' (see Appendix A).

As you the reader can see from Appendix A, the 15 items were designed to evaluate five main areas of the time management skills of the students. These included their practices in goal setting (items 6, 10, 14, 15), prioritizing activities (items 1, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15), managing interruption (items 5, 9, 11, 12), beating procrastination (items 2, 10, 12), and scheduling activities they do (items 3, 7, 12)**.**

This shows that each item had a value of five scores. There were also items which were designed to evaluate the time management skills of the students in more than one area. Fore example, Item 9 measured skills in prioritizing activities and their skills in managing interruptions in their day to day activities. Similarly, Item 12 evaluated their skills in managing interruptions, overcoming procrastination and scheduling activities.

Each student's score in these main areas was calculated using the Mind Tools Ltd soft program which had the following maximum scores: goal setting 20 scores, prioritization 35 scores, management interruption 20 scores, procrastination 15 scores, and scheduling 15 scores. The Mind Tools Ltd soft program also calculated the scores of each student and gave stars which ranged from 1to 5 to indicate the degree of each student's effectiveness in each main area. However, the aggregate responses of the students were categorized and used for discussions.

Findings

Overall Time Management Skills

According to the Mind Tools Ltd, scores 46-75 show very effective time management skills, while scores 15- 30 indicate poor time management habits. Scores 31-45 indicate occasional good practices of time management with some areas that need improvement elsewhere. Table 1 below shows the students' aggregate effectiveness of their time management habits.

Table 1: Overall effectiveness of time management

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
46- 75	43	53.75%
31- 45	37	46.25%
15- 30	-	-
Total	**80**	**100%**

As shown in Table 1 above, slightly above half (53.75%) of the target summer students, in general, have effective time management skills, and a little less than half (46.75%) are 'good' at time management practices in some areas and 'poor' in some aspects.

The fact that 53.75% of the students have effective time practices dose not mean that these students are 'good' in all the aspects of time management practices. As we shall see later, some of these may be more effective in goal setting and others in areas such as beating procrastination, scheduling, managing interruptions, or prioritization.

Time Management Skills in Specific Areas Skills in Goal Setting

As mentioned above, Items 6, 10, 14, and 15 were used to measure students' skills in goal setting, and had the value of 20 scores. To these items, the minimum score calculated was 5/20 and the maximum was 17/20. Thus, the stars given for these scores ranged between 1 and 4. Table 2 below shows the scores of the students in ranged according to the stars given.

Table 2: Skills in setting goals

Scores	Stars	No. Students	Percentage
5- 7	1	6	7.5%
8- 10	2	28	35%
11-14	3	41	51.25%
15- 17	4	5	6.25%
Total		**80**	**100%**

As Table 2 above shows, of the 80 students, only 5 (6.25%) are 'good' at skills in setting goals as their calculated scores are 15-17/20 of four stars, while a similar percent 6 (7.5%) are 'very poor', and 28 (35%) are 'poor' at goal setting skills as they are given only one star and two stars, respectively. Table 2 also shows that a majority of the students, 41 (51.25%), are sometimes 'good' and sometimes 'ineffective' in goal setting. This shows that quiet a significant number of the

summer students do set goals for their studies which guide them to their final destinations, or achieving their objectives.

Skills in Prioritizing Daily Activities

Items 1, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, and 15 were designed to examine the target summer students' skills in prioritizing their daily activities, which had the value of 35 scores. To these items, the minimum score calculated was 14/35 and the maximum was 33/35. Thus, the stars given for these scores ranged between 2 and 5. Table 3 below shows the calculated scores of students in ranges with the stars given accordingly

Table 3: Skills in prioritizing daily activities

Scores	Stars	No. Students	Percentage
14- 18	2	17	21.25%
19- 25	3	40	50%
26-30	4	20	25%
31- 35	5	3	3.75%
Total		**80**	**100%**

As shown in Table 3, though quite a significant number of the students do not have good skills in goal setting (Table 2), a higher number of students are 'good' at prioritizing their daily activities. It is indicated in the table that 20 and 3 students are given five and four stars, respectively for their skills in prioritizing activities, which indicates that 25% and 3.75% of the students are 'good' and 'very good' at prioritizing activities they do each day. Half of the students, 40 (50%), are 'average' at prioritizing their daily activities, which shows that they are sometimes effective and sometimes ineffective in prioritizing their daily activities. Table 3 further shows that 21.25% of the target summer students are 'poor' at prioritizing their daily activities, which suggests there are students who wander here and there because of not knowing the value of the activities they do each day.

Skills in Managing Interruptions

One area of time management skills is ability to deal with interruptions such as by visiting friends, receiving calls and other social engagements while engaged in daily activities according to plans. Items 5, 9, 11, and12 aimed at examining the students' ability to manage such unexpected interruptions in their daily activities, and they had the value of 20 scores. For these items, the minimum score calculated was 6/20 and the maximum was 19/20. Thus, the stars given for these scores ranged between 1 and 5. Table 4 below depicts the calculated scores of the students in ranges with the stars given.

Table 4: Skills in managing interruptions

Scores	Stars	No. Students	Percentage
6	1	1	1.25%
8- 10	2	11	13.75%
11- 14	3	50	62.50%
15- 17	4	15	18.75%
81-19	5	3	3.75%
Total		**80**	**100%**

Table 4 above reveals that only 22. 50% of the students are effective in managing unexpected interruptions during their stays on campus. Of these, 18.75% are 'good' and 3.75% are 'very good' in the relevant skill domain. However, 13.75% and 1.25% of the students are 'poor' and 'very poor', respectively. This shows that 14% of the students are often interrupted from their daily activities because of the fact that they do not have skills in handling interruptions.

Skills in Overcoming Procrastination

 Items 2, 10 and 12 aimed at assessing the target students' ability to manage problems related to procrastination. These items had the aggregate value of 15 scores. The minimum calculated score was 2/15 and the maximum was 15/15. Thus,

the stars given for these scores ranged between 1 and 5. Table 5 below presents the calculated scores of the students in ranges with the stars given.

Table 5: Beating procrastination

Scores	Stars	No. Students	Percentage
2-5	1	8	10%
6- 7	2	16	20%
8- 10	3	34	42.5%
11- 13	4	18	22.5%
14-15	5	4	5%
Total		**80**	**100%**

Table 5 above shows that only 22 of the target students (27.5%) are effective in doing assignments and related study tasks on time, as their calculated scores are 11 and above out of the total 15 scores with four and five stars. However, 30% of the students 'often' and 'very often' procrastinate as their calculated scores are 7 and below with one and two stars. This implies that 30 of the students do assignments and other study tasks towards the end of the deadline. This might be one main reason for their submitting poorly organized writing assignments. Table 5 also shows that a large number of the students (42.5%) sometimes do not do activities on time, which implies that they sometimes produce organized assignments and sometimes disorganized assignments.

Skills in Scheduling Activities

 Items **3, 7 and 12** were designed to examine the students' scheduling practices of the activities they do. These items had a total value of 15 scores. The minimum calculated score with regard to scheduling practices was 3/15 and the maximum was 13/15. Thus, the stars given for these scores ranged between 1 and 4. Table 6 below presents the calculated scores of the students' scheduling practices with the stars given accordingly.

Table 6: Scheduling activities

Scores	Stars	No. Students	Percentage
3-5	1	7	8.75%
6- 7	2	17	21.25%
8- 10	3	43	53.75%
11- 13	4	13	16.25%
Total		**80**	**100%**

In much the same manner as their practices of not doing study activities in good time, the majority of the summer students are generally not good at scheduling their daily activities. As shown in Table 6 above, only 13 (16.25%) of the students said that they often scheduled what they did each day, while 7 (8.75%) reported that they never planned their daily undertaking and 17 (21.25%) said that they rarely programmed their daily activities. Thus, 30% of the students are 'poor' and/or 'very poor' in scheduling their study task when they stay on campus. The Table also depicts that 53.75% of the students sometimes do and sometimes do not schedule activities. This shows that there are quite a significant number of summer students who do not know clearly what they do each day.

Conclusions

This study came up with interesting findings about the time management skills of the targeted summer students. Only slightly more than half (53.75%) have effective time management practices, which actually dose not at all paint a good picture about the students' possession of diverse time management skills. For example, only 6.25% of the target students are 'good' at skills in setting goals, while the majority, (42.5%), are 'poor' at goal setting skills. This shows that quiet a significant number of the summer students do set goals for their studies to guide them to arrive at their final destinations, or achieving their objectives.

This study also shows there are quite a number of students who do not prioritize their daily activities, and who also could not manage unexpected interruptions because of poor time management skills. The study further reveals that quite a large number of the students (42.5%) sometimes do not do activities on time, which implies that they do assignments and homework towards the end, and more probably also study when exams approach. However, it can also be said from the results of the study that a number of students do schedule what they do.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Sex: Female_____ **Male:** _____ **Service (in years):** _____

Instruction: *Read each question, and tick (√) in the column that most applies to you.*

No	Questions	Not at all	Rarely	Some-times	often	Very often
1	Are the tasks you work on during the day (homework, assignment, or reading in libraries) the ones with the highest priority?					
2	Do you find yourself completing homework or assignment at the last minute, or ask for extensions?					
3	Do you set aside time for planning and scheduling your time (for attending classes, doing homework/assignment, reading in the libraries, recreation, calling family, or visiting friends/relatives)?					
4	Do you know how much time you are spending on the various activities (for attending classes, doing homework/assignment, reading in the libraries and recreation, or visiting friends/relatives) you do each day?					
5	How do you find yourself with dealing interruptions by visiting friends, receiving calls, or social factors?					
6	Do you use goal setting to decide what tasks and activities you should work on?					
7	Do you leave contingency time in your schedule to deal with 'the unexpected' (visiting friends, telephone calls, etc.)?					

8	Do you know whether the tasks you are working on are low, medium or high value?					
9	When you are given a new assignment, or when you want to read/study, do you analyze it for importance and prioritize it accordingly?					
10	Are you stressed about deadlines of submitting assignments?					
11	Do distractions often keep you from your critical activities such as attending classes, doing assignments, or reading?					
12	Do you find you have to do homework/assignment, or you postpone doing?					
13	Do you prioritize your daily activities by preparing to-do-list, or action program?					
14	Do you regularly confirm you priorities with your friends or teachers?					
15	Before you take on a task (studying, or doing assignments), do you check that the results will be worth the time put in?					

Mind Tools Ltd, 1995-2010