

WCPCG-2011

Effects of learning styles and time management on academic achievement

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Abstract

The present paper presents an experiment conducted between November 2009 and February 2011. The main hypothesis of the study was that efficient time management, under the guidance of an educational counselor, lead to significant increases in students academic performances and, consequently, lead to academic success. A number of 130 participants with low academic performances after the first two semesters (October 2009 – February 2010 – First semester, March – June 2010 – The second semester) participated in the study. All participants had above average or superior intellectual abilities (according to baccalaureate results). The educational counselor elaborated individualized and flexible programs for each participant in the experimental condition according to students learning styles, circadian, and eating rhythms, and daily and weekly effort curves. The program included planning of all activities participants were to develop during the two months of the experimental intervention. The results confirmed the hypothesis, showing the efficiency of time management individualized programs. © 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the 2nd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance.

Keywords: Time management, learning styles, academic succes;

1. Introduction

In Romania, college admission to many study programs is based on a file. Baccalaureate grade is the selection criteria for both budgeted and fee admission. We noticed, on an empirical basis, that a significant percentage of students have lower academic results in their first semester than the baccalaureate results. Most of students complain about the lack of time for learning. Considering this situation, we initiated an investigation in order to establish if efficient time management could be a solution.

Learning styles are defined as the personal preference for using certain learning strategies and techniques. According to some authors (Linksman, 1999), one can increase his or her academic results by knowing his learning style and adopting adequate learning techniques. Main characteristics of the four styles are presented as follows. *Auditory style* – learns by listening conversations, explanations or presentations; speaks loudly during the action taken in order to learn; speaks in mind; surrounding noises easily distract him; learns much more easily when reading aloud the material; prefers oral responses rather than written ones. *Visual style* – learns by perceiving the written material; processes information by using figures, maps, images, diagrams; learned material is fixed through re-reading or re-writing; places great importance on details; retains much easier what is seen than what is heard;

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forgets verbal instructions; reads fast and correct; prefers written responses rather than oral ones. *Kinesthetic style* – prefers to be physically involved in the learning activity; uses non-verbal communication; learns best in situation in which he can experience; lack of activity leads to agitation; builds models and manipulates objects in order to find explanations to abstract concepts; rarely talks; retains learning material while walking; uses body action to demonstrate what he learned.

2. Time management. Theoretical aspects

Transition from high-school program (with fix schedule for the whole week, mandatory attendance to courses, daily homework) to higher education program (with flexible schedule, long breaks during courses, non-mandatory attendance to courses, final evaluations only) may lead to time wasting. Almost 73% of students start learning or actually learn with less than one week before exams period. Overwhelmed by the volume of learning material and the short period available, they fail in reaching the previous performance, which was strongly associated to their intellectual abilities. Time management becomes important for each student, but it is most important for those students employed in a job or a volunteer activity. Students should be aware of their working rhythm and should learn to organize their activities according to all factors influencing performance. According to Carroll's model (Ionescu, 1995), psychological time can act in a constructive or destructive manner on intrinsic motivation, supporting or inhibiting activity, therefore constructing temporal perspective through setting objectives (or aspiration level) becomes necessary. Time is a major resource in learning, the way in which people perceive and invest time reflects on learning results. The evolution of beliefs regarding time organization (Covey, 1998) recorded four distinct generations, characterized as follows: keeping records through notes and lists; trying to look to the future through indexes, tables and agenda; setting priorities and planning through objectives; moving interest center from time to maintaining balance between production and production capacity (according to urgency and importance).

Time management is an ability that can be developed at any age, if the person desires to improve the results of his actions (Dale, 1993). Previous research (Magher, 2005) shows that students are much more motivated if they can solve the task in a personal rhythm. Students should be aware of the hours of maximum effort and should adapt their personal rhythm to circadian and ultradian rhythm (Clinciu et al., 2005). Circadian rhythm is a result of light-dark alternation. Circadian rhythms repeat cyclic at every 24 hours, the duration of each component (light and dark) varies as a function of Earth position to the Sun. Most physiological processes relates to these rhythms. Each day, at regular periods, the human body needs food, sleep, activity, lack of activity, energy. Body temperature, heart beats, blood pressure, hormonal levels, urine flux increase and decrease in a predictable rhythm influenced by exposure to light or dark. In the absence of natural light, the circadian rhythms desynchronize leading to exhaustion. Under the impact of circadian rhythm, vigilance (Montagner, 2002) varies, these variations becoming the effort curve. The ultradian rhythm refers to activity-break alternation. The duration of an activity in post-adolescence period should be of no longer than 90 – 100 minutes (Clinciu et al., 2005). Active breaks are recommended: if the learning activity requires left hemisphere, the 10 – 15 minutes breaks will consists of an activity requiring right hemisphere. Food rhythm – dictated by body's need for food – influences learning, three meals a day are recommended in order to maintain under control its influence.

3. Methodology

The present paper is based on an experiment conducted during November 2009 and February 2011. The main *hypothesis* of the experiment is: efficient time management under the guidance of an educational counselor lead to significant increases in academic performance of students and, consequently, lead to academic success.

Methods: 1. Interests' constellation and time management grid (adapted for the experiment after Magher, 2005) – G.C.I.G.T. – consists of 28 observational domains, categorized in extra-curricular activities (Group A) and curricular activities (Group B), the 14 categories in each group are ranked. The grid was a measure of average time allocated for different activities; data were collected both in pre-test and post-test. 2. Learning style questionnaire

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