Significance of Time in Management of Socio-Academic Activities in Learning Institutions

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Abstract

This literature review paper contends that managing socio-academic activities is a reflection of a well-executed plan within a specific period of time as a key resource. It first defines time as a contextual concept in which academic and other social activities are managed. This formed the basic time premises for discussion, and focused on how academic activities can be managed and why some individuals do not manage their own activities. Mathematical iterations were used to show that some people considered time to be an entity for accommodating activities rather than planning for such activities coverable within specific period on transitory; implying that time can be managed. In contrast; time is fluid and not manageable emphasizing on prioritizing activities manageable within available time. The paper has shown that this consider time as a resource in transitory embracing the PAST experiences supported by the NOW experiences while imagining the FUTURE which literarily becomes the past for successful and total development of humanity. The paper concludes that while time plays crucial role in managing human activities, by itself it is difficult to manage it. It recommends that a socio-academic environment that embraces prioritization academic activities need to be appropriately planned and managed within a contextualized time space while minimizing crash programmes in learning and teaching processes.

Keywords: Time; Transitory; Continuum Phases; Mathematical iterations; total development of humanity

What is Time?

"If no one asketh me I know, if I wish to explain to one that asketh me I know not" (Gadamer, 1977:35). This is the mystery, which surrounds the gap between the pre-reflexive practical application of time concepts and the inability of many users to define it. Time is conceptually defined to suit a user's needs from different perspectives.

Scientifically, time is a metric unit of measurement, which marks the expenditure of a precious commodity (period) in human life. The units of measurement such as seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years are used to signify a period in which various activities are supposed to be covered. Whether or not the activities are covered, the periods still elapse. This may cause a backlog of uncovered activities and tension among the actors.

Sociologically, time can be defined as a tool to express sentiments in form of pleasures and dissatisfaction. Phrases such as 'kill the time' is used to define a situation in which activities are slow and boring.

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Another phrase 'good time' is used to denote situation in which activities are pleasurable and periods that seem to be moving fast. Similarly 'save time' is used when one is pressurized by anxiety whereas 'time is money' may be used when one suspects a possible loss in business. The implication of these metaphors is that some activities have been either successfully managed or mismanaged.

Philosophically 'time is existence and all existence is time. Time's transit leaves traces so that man's future doubts may not agree with his present doubts based on such traces which he experiences' (Seizo, 1977:88). These experiences strengthen man's desire for rational knowledge expressed in terms of concepts. This paves way for academic development. They also create man's awareness of life, which is governed by different factors in existence. So, the philosophical units of measurement of time may be defined as the past, the present and the future, which are the basic for academic constructivism. Individuals consider their effective management of academic activities through these units.

The future gives one hope (if imagining of good results – motivation) and forgetfulness when one considers the failure as an outcome (discouragement). The 'past' helps one to live in reminiscence glorifying the experiences. This leads to a transitory conceptualization of time in that the 'present is every man's now when now we think of the past and the future' (Seizo, 1977:83). In a transitory process, time cannot be separated from individuals. In class, time is there. In bed time is there. In theatre, time is there. What is important is the value of that time at the prevailing conditions. That is why some individuals sacrifice their pleasurable now for their 'greater good in future' (Gadamer, 1977:42) – commitment to planned academic activities within time abstraction as shown in Figure 1.
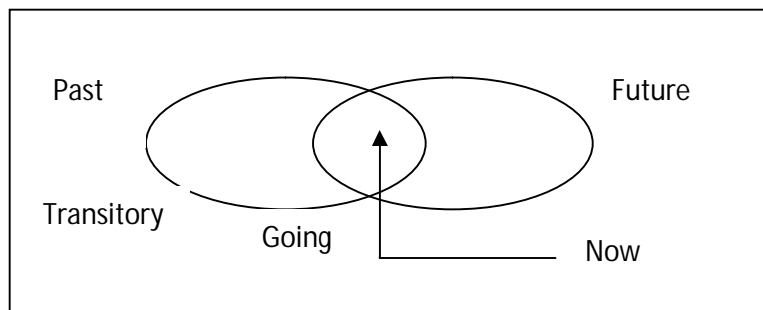
E = { Time Transitory Continuum}

Figure 1: Time Transitory Abstraction (Source: Abstracted from Gadamer, 1977 & Chritchley, 2009)

Other individuals would prefer to practically live happily 'how' to the abstraction of the future time. As Able (1977) argues, the abstraction of time 'presupposes the abstraction of work, which increases the number of intermediaries between man and nature" (Abel, 1977:108). Hence, there is need for great care in planning one" activities. One can rightly argue that such abstraction of time influence individual's academic work. It can also help to explain why some people either do not keep time or mismanage their academic activities.

Academically, time can be defined as the basic independent variable within which learning is influenced by dependent variables. It is therefore a desire for practical knowledge expressed in an abstract form. In this paper, academic activities include lectures, tutorials, group discussions, co-curricular activities, examinations and administrative issue. These activities are managed either by an individual or groups of individuals. Such groups include students, administrators, lecturers as well as the parent. The efficiency by which these individuals influence the management of the academic activities depends on each individual's conceptualization of time. This will be discussed in the next sections.

Managing Academic Activities

Human life is naturally surrounded by pleasures and crises. It involves constant delicate balance between human demands and needs. Ideally such balances should lead to prioritization of an individual's activities. However, as Bush (1980) puts it, "priorities are set not by the relative importance of a task, but by the relative necessity to do it". An individual will first deal with the activities required of him through deadlines. Deadlines therefore rule individual's personal plans and needs. This sometimes leads to crises. In education system, when the "deal is clearly out of step with the needs or absorptive capacity", the institutions" systems become distorted and drawn out of balance, leading to crisis in form of strikes (King, 1976). Academic and other social activities become disrupted and mismanaged.

The concept of managing academic activities within a given period is not a new phenomenon. In the 20th Century American schooling was defined in terms of credit hours for each student (Anderson, 1984). Any education system needs to enhance productive application of time in all situations, especially in academic pursuits (Kamunge, 1988). In Kenyan public universities, it is known that students must attend at least 80% of the lecture-hours in a given semester. The assumption is that once one attends lectures or tutorials within a specific period, he/she will be able to learn and acquire certain academic knowledge. In this respect, fixed time is taken to be a learning resource. However, Anderson (1984) has shown that time is necessary but not a sufficient condition for learning. What goes on in such a period is difficult to articulate because it is a part of what goes on in the learner's thinking. It also depends on the classroom 'climate' in which thoughts, feelings and dreams of the learner influence the actual learning.

Scholars in Education Management (Hoyle, 1986, Bush et al 1980) consider time to be a learning resource, which also acts as an indicator of status for some academic subjects, and those teaching them. One can therefore rightly argue that rather than time being a mere resource, it is analogically a catalyst. It catalyses different activities that take place in school contexts, the catalytic power being experienced in the power of our minds through imaginations. Such imaginations cause the learning differences in every individual. Thus:

a. Inherent differences in learning activities and rates as reflected in aptitude scores.
b. Differences in individual motivation
c. Experiencing difficulties in tasks and content in each learning activity.
d. Rate of following instructions, which discriminates against weak students (Carroll, 1984)

When such differences occur, students will portray different levels of managing their learning activities . Their plan of study will be different within a specific period and it can therefore be argued that we cannot easily plan time, instead we can only control our activities within a specified period of time. What looks like planning time in the management of activities is essentially the manipulation of such activities and the available resources in order to accomplish them within a given period; hence, some unrealistic deadlines and increased time pressures. It is in this view that the concept of time needs to be characterized and defined for appropriate usage in the management of socio-academic activities in general and study activities in particular, for academic purposive. In this perspective, Gitonga (2008) and *www.ehow.com* have stipulated some study activities such as associating facts with memories, reviewing materials read and making notes that can be considered in planning for time management. It is therefore necessary to conceptualize time and its usefulness in managing social, academic and economic activities in various premises.

Based on Seizo's (1977) view regarding time in relation to temporarily and freedoms, this manipulation can be expressed in three premises.

Premise 1: This premise takes available time to be a continuum resource and only needs academic activities to be fixed. It assumes that activities are always available but time is limited. This requires one to define time in conventions such as day, week, year and hour in which various activities can be done. The implication of this is that there is likelihood of an activity taking more time than required. This is mostly experienced in individualized learning in which the learner moves on only after mastering certain initial concepts. This can lead to a backlog of activities (Many-one mapping).

Premise 2: This premise assumes that limited activities are available but time is always plenty. It is important to stress that activities are conceptualized and practically tried. They can therefore not be limited. There is need to creatively select important academic activities from many others, but this premise does not do that.

This results in hurriedly crash programmes, organized with unrealistic deadlines set for implementation. The laid down plans become disorganized, leading to crisis (Many-one mapping)

Premises 3: This premise assumes that there is a specified time for a specified activity. The assumption is that from the continuum time and infinitely many activities become a 1-1 mapping process. It is in this premise that plans are made and the concept of making priorities from various activities is developed. This is considered to be a compromising premise. Essentially, time has to be fixed for every specified activity in any educational planning. This is what is commonly regarded as effective time management for useful study habits.

Executing a 1-1 time management plan requires one to control and sometimes re-plan some activities. While re-planning for activities is important, some re-planning processes lead to time crisis and learning crash programme. Such unexpected plans commonly replace anticipated programmes. This caused pressure and anxiety not only on the learners replace anticipated programmes. This causes pressure and anxiety not only on the learners but the programmes implementers too. In order to minimize such crashes, institutions of learning use time-tables as a technique for managing their academic activities. In preparing such time-tables, however, little consideration is given to students' differences in learning. Under fixed time, students' differences are transformed into differences in students' academic achievement. That is why Carroll's (1984) model is idealistically useful for the preparation of an institutional time-table. The efficiency of these plans depends on the administrative components of learning institutions and the academic classroom management practice. Thus:

1. Management: The structure and procedures involved in coordinating the diverse activities of the institution. 2.Structure of tasks: The time tables, pattern of students' study groups, by which transformation of knowledge and skills are structured. 3. Curriculum: The sets of knowledge, skills values selected from a wider range and codified through syllabuses and classroom activities. 4. Pedagogy: The process by which knowledge and skills are transmitted through class teaching and through informal processes of teaching and learning. 5.Informal structure: The unplanned patterns of association between teachers and the students (Hoyle, 1986:3).

These structures important but not sufficient to reach required efficiency for managing the activities.

The required efficiency can be reached if the functions of each component are effectively controlled through individual's proper planning and commitment. One needs not only to plan but also to optimize available resources in executing the plans. Such optimization can only reflect an individual's concept of time which can be explained through a mathematical iterations. Thus

a. If one regards time as the source of success, he is likely to plan his activities to suit a given period with arrangement for an alternative plan if some problems occur (premise)

b. If one regards time as a source of joy, he/she is likely to get engaged only in activities which lead to relaxation and enjoyment.
It is important to note that some activities which lead to enjoyment are never planned for, thus distorting other programmes. But relaxation is an important tool for learning (premises 2,3)

c. If one regards time as a wagon to convey some ideals in life, he is likely to either over plan or overdo some activities. In such a situation, a plan for the activities is never matched with the necessary ideas. Some desires, which cannot be planned for, casually occur and sub-due the individual's needs (premise 2)

Majority of the people who conceptualize time as a source of joy, a wagon to convey some interests not only inconvenience others but also cause them to abandon their plans. They fail to identify common priorities in a system and therefore engage themselves in intrinsically motivated, but positive academic achievement.

How Mismanagement of Activities Occurs

Individual's emotions and desires can lead to either stoppage or over planning of some activities. If an activity is stopped for some reasons, time will continue to elapse. If an activity is over-planned, the definition of a definite period remains the same. If an institution is closed down because the learners have rioted, time will not stop to await the riots to cease or the institution to re-open. As it was mentioned earlier, the planners, the implementers and the administrators of such programmes (academic) have devised crash programmes for time compensation. Although no new time is created, many activities are 'thoroughly crashed' within a short period leading to time crisis. When time crisis is unbearable, the activities become unimaginable and the whole system falters.

This activities' unmanageability can be expressed in a mathematical iteration derived from the Anderson's (1984) framework of learning hypothesis.

For example consider the management of academic activities in an institution such as a university. Suppose:

(i) t is the time available for all the university activities as defined in its calendar and statutes; and n is the time allocated to each course in which both students and lecturers engage themselves in the learning activities.

(ii) Let $\frac{ai}{n}$ be the proportion of the engaged time for the ith academic activity, $\frac{bi}{n}$ for the ith leisure activity, $\frac{ci}{n}$ for the ith social activity.

Let $\frac{Xi}{t-n}$ be the proportion of time spent in running an ith administrative activity.

Then, the total time T spent on various academic activities in the university, planned or unplanned, can be expressed as $T = \frac{1}{n}(a_i + b_i + c_i + \ldots) = \frac{1}{t-n}(x_i + y_i + \ldots)$, where n>0 and t-n $\neq$ 0. It then follows that either t-T $\geq$ 0 or t-T $\leq$ 0, hence, t $\geq$ T or t $\leq$ T.

Analytical implication of this is : (a) When t > T, it implies that the activities have been managed well before the expected period elapsed. This means that:

i. The activities were well planned and efficiently done leaving room for some revision. In this case, good academic results may be expected.

ii. The activities had been poorly planned or well planned but shoddily done. The implementer may pretend to be doing a good piece of work. The results may therefore be unpleasant.

(b) When t=T, it implies that the activities have been managed as planned, probably with the minimal interruptions. It means that the demands of the work and the needs have attained an absorptive level of tolerance as expected. This may produce pleasant results (1-1 mapping).

(c) When t < T, it implies that the planned activities have either not been well managed or are unmanageable, leading to a crisis. Crash programmes and impromptu meetings then become key characteristics of such a situation in an attempt to salvage the plans.

It can then be argued that t = T and t > T are the possible ideal situations, which every individual should strive to achieve through their effective plans. One can argue that when the demands and the estimated periods are at equilibrium, the activities have been effectively well-planned, and well managed.

When extra time seems to exist, one can say that either the workers (teachers/learners) have been efficient, have not performed as expected or the tasks have been too easy. Whichever the case, the plans (programmes) will need immediate review. When there is time deficit (t < T) one can argue that either the planner was over-ambitious, the workers relaxed seriously for some reasons or the tasks were too difficult. Whichever the case, there is a cause for not managing the planned activities and the review of the programmes should be necessary.

This approach does not mean that spending time in managing academic activities is a function of a mathematician only. Nevertheless, one is required to proportionately organize such activities in a manageable proportions. In fact, every individual has personal work ethics and philosophy of managing activities by significantly using available time, without necessarily managing time, making some individual live in the past. The amount of work and when it should be done will vary with each person's concept of time and interpretation of work activities. This is one of the reasons why such individuals may not be able to manage their activities.

Why People Do not Manage their Activities

"Man, endowed with intelligence has endeavored to comprehend his environment and himself. In his zeal to further unfold the ignorance blanket surrounding him, he has attempted to seek explanations, causes and solutions to mystery of the life" (Piri, 1988:26).

In this endeavor, he hears, argues and does what he considers to be right for him to do. His failures are supported by excuses and explanations. When a right thing is done, naturally little explanations and excuses are required. Socially, one is expected to do what is right. However, as Seizo (1977:84) puts it, "to do what is right,… it is not enough to know what is right. We do only what we would like to do. So in order to do the right thing we have not only to know it intellectually but want it actually". So the mechanism, which controls human actions goes beyond knowledge and reason to the desire and will to do it within specific time. These are commonly embraced in bodily feelings, emotions and time experiences. For example, joy and pleasure will encourage one to do an activity while pain and sorrow will discourage him.

There are various reasons which explain why individuals do not manage their activities; and the main reason has its source in time. Failure to manage activities means that the same individual is unable to keep time with regard to the planned activities. Failure to keep time is associated with the culture of people especially in developing countries (Gachamba, 1992). There is the argument that many people in developing countries do not have fixed time-tables for family programmes such as eating breakfast, or supper together. They have no watches and clocks, which could probably make them, time conscious. It is important to note that looking at the clock or watch does not make one to be time conscious, know how time moves and in fact how to keep it. It only emphasizes what Chritchley (2009) calls "vulgar", that the future is not yet and concentrates on now. While this may be good indicator for useful time management, the action opens with it comes out individual's past, personal and cultural baggage of having-been-ness (Chritchley, 2009).

In contrast, research by Eshiwani (1983) has shown that the development of time concepts among the African children is not a function of the availability of a clock or a watch in a family. It should also be noted that wearing a watch, hanging a clock in front of us does not necessarily make us to be time conscious. So being time conscious is a natural trait. This explains why some village elders fairly kept time in pursuing their planned activities.

Time consciousness is therefore a function of a good plan and the desire and will to execute the plan. One will always want to manage the planned activities within a given period but the will to do it, is intrinsically motivated. This is what makes learning to be effective.

The following factors can therefore be taken as some of the reasons, which make learners not manage their activities effectively.

a. Lack of the ability to do tasks; carelessness
b. Excessive laxity and laziness, probably due to lack of motivation
c. Lack of commitment to doing the tasks.
d. The nature of the task
e. Lack of resources and appropriate opportunities to do the tasks
f. Backlog of the tasks
g. External pressures
h. Health conditions:
  i. Emotions
  ii. Sickness
  iii. Accident
  iv. Tiredness, fatigue or boredom
  v. Lack of planning

Most of these factors relate to individual's personality. One therefore needs to examine himself and his plans so as to prepare for various activities.

In view of this, the following is suggested:

i. Each individual to provide time opportunity by being present when the planned activities take place.
ii. Re-plan the activities when inevitable accidents occur with sufficient consultations as necessary
iii. Provide the opportunity for other individuals to solve problems and manage activities in the system even if the problems do not directly concern you.
iv. Do not over-load the system by over-planning for the sake of being seen to be working.

Implication of Time in Administration and Management of Pedagogy

All learning activities in an institution are planned on a timetable as a control measure. Calendars and curricular are designed to show the courses to be covered in different subjects. However, in certain circumstances, such plans do not get accomplished as expected. This has some pedagogical implications different from that of an institutional system.

i. To administration

When administrators, who are supposed to enhance the smooth running of an institution, engage their time in lobbying for prestigious positions inside and outside the institution, the administrative activities are likely to be underachieved. For example, if the administrator is negatively affected by such lobbying, the academic activities are likely to suffer as well. Learning resources will reduce. If he positively gains the prestige, there is likelihood of an administrative gap developing between him and learners or between him and the instructors. Such a gap will minimize proper communication in the institution. Strikes and demonstrations may occur, necessitating closures of the institution. The academic activities will therefore stop.

ii. To Teaching

Teachers, especially those who differ in principles with an administrator, take precious time to appease themselves in classes by telling stories about the administration. They develop apathy. When programmes are not well planned, teachers become over-loaded with academic work.

Other teachers spend their time in satisfying their unplanned for social wants. Such engagement deters the effective management of academic activities. This may cause backlog of such activities. Teaching becomes limited.

iii. To the Learning

Learners benefit from the activities which are effectively managed within a specified period. In this case, they will be taught well and are likely to do well in their examinations. However, if there are crises, the students will either be taught and learn poorly or experience the load of the accumulated learning activities. Crash programmes will be started with the effect of timing the students. The syllabus may be covered during such programmes but students may not learn effectively.

iv. For Courses

If an institutional calendar and syllabuses are strictly followed, a well-planned course should be completed effectively. However, over ambitiously planned courses can lead either to learners and teachers being overloaded or to the course content not being covered adequately or not being covered at all. Over-ambitious planning rarely considers the nature of tasks for a particular level.

In some education systems, the importance of some courses has been shown by the number of hours they occupy in a timetable (Bush et al, 1980). The more important a course is thought to be, the more hours and priorities it will be given on the time table.

The lecturers and teachers of such subjects will accordingly feel very important. This may cause friction among teachers/lecturers of various courses and if in university, the ill-feelings may develop among students taking certain courses. Apart from the important of a course, its demands should also be considered as a useful criterion in making plans for learning activities.

Conclusion

This article has shown that time is an important element in the management of socio-academic activities in learning institutions. However, its abstractness makes it difficult for humanity to manage various activities; and its pragmatic nature is felt when a specific task is to be completed within a specific period. In this view, there is need to contextualize time in the form of 1-1 mapping; and through critical thinking, use it to plan and manage socio-academic activities. Unless such contextualization takes place in our learning institutions, apriority activities will always be accomplished at the expense of quality learning. Quality learning which the base is for total development of humanity is propped by time transistorizes: PAST experiences and supported by the NOW experiences, must enhance the FUTURE successes. That is the crucial role of time: building a human race. No other option. PREMISE 3 of the definition of time must uphold for successful management of socio-academic activities in the learning institutions.

Recommendations

It is said that a stitch in time saves nine, but it can also be argued that effective management of activities saves success. For this to happen in a socio-academic environment, academic activities need to be appropriately managed within a conceptualized specific period by using the following suggestions:

i.   Provide time experiences by being present when activities begin to take place
ii. Limit overloaded plans including curricula and syllabuses.
iii. Commitment to duty devoid of ego-centralism should be emphasized
iv. Since a spent period cannot be retrieved, crash programmes should be minimized
v.   Individuals should be provided with the opportunities to solve problems even if the problems do not directly concern them as individuals.

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