

**FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EARLY COMPLETION OF LONG ESSAYS  
BY M. ED EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this research was to find out the background of sandwich graduate students at UEW who were unable to complete their programmes of study within the stipulated time. The study also attempted to find out the effects of improper time management on them and the barriers to the early completion of their thesis. The research design was a descriptive survey and the sampling technique used was simple random sampling for student-respondents and purposive sampling method for supervisor-respondents. The study found, among other things that over ninety percent of M.Ed students are working full time and the demands on their jobs, family, social and academic work put undue pressure on them, contributing to their inability to complete their programmes within the stipulated time. It also came to light, through interviews with supervisors that poor writing skills on the part of students was a barrier to their early completion. The paper concludes with recommendations to help resolve the challenge.*

**KEYWORDS:** Essay, Education, M.Ed, Sandwich Students, Winneba

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, Universities in Ghana have tried to take academic work to the door steps of prospective students. As difficult as this has been, the Universities have moved from the conservative on-campus lecture to combining both on-campus and off-campus schooling. The On-campus is the traditional form of schooling where students are admitted and stay on campus for a specified period (Miller, 2009). Sandwich is also a form of schooling where students admitted report when the regular or on-campus students are out of campus. Sandwich session programmes are organized during long vacations and it runs for two years. Students report and go through a compressed programme for a period of time. These students combine their work and school at the same time.

This is quite different from the part-time programme, where students close from work and attend classes at the close of work. In the case of Sandwich programmes, students either combine their schooling with work, family issues and other societal engagements. These engagements have the tendency of taking almost all their time which could culminate in their inability to complete their project/research work on time due to the role conflicts between their job, family and other societal demands and their academic work (Lucier, 2008). These roles the students play, put undue pressure on the students and affects their ability to manage their

time very efficiently and effectively. This presents a challenge a challenge to students in completing their sandwich programmes within the stipulated time.

The issue with the students is that most sandwich students are faced with the challenge of being able to complete their programmes within the stipulated time. Perhaps, they are unable to complete the programme due to their inability to manage their time effectively. This paper therefore seeks to find out how sandwich students manage their time in all their endeavors as they also pursue Education in Higher Institutions and at the same time manage their time in other engagements.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Graduate students who enroll on the UEW sandwich programmes seem unable to complete their programmes within the time stipulated for their course. Some of them blame their Lecturers for not being available to offer guidance and supervise their thesis as required of them. It is also an undeniable fact that some of these students have to combine work, studies and also have to grapple with domestic and societal responsibilities in addition to the programme on which they have enrolled.

The Sandwich programmes are scheduled to span from a specific starting time to a specific time for completion and also a grace period of one (1) academic year for every student to complete. This however has not been the case over the years. One wonders whether such delays are as a result of poor time management skills among students, lack of effective supervision by lecturers or as a result of the backgrounds of students admitted. This study therefore intends to find out the factors that challenge the early completion of long essays by M. Ed Educational Administration Sandwich students.

### **Purpose of Study**

The study investigated the factors that influence M. Ed students' inability to graduate within the stipulated time. Specifically, the study examined:

1. How students manage their time in relation to their studies.
2. How they manage their work, domestic and societal activities.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the background of the students who enroll on the sandwich programme
2. To identify the barriers to early completion of their thesis
3. To examine the effects of good time management skills in the successful completion of programmes by sandwich students.
4. To examine the role of lecturers/supervisors in the successful completion of sandwich programmes by students in the Department of Educational Administration.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the backgrounds of the students who enroll on the M. Ed Sandwich programme?
2. What are the barriers to early completion of students' thesis?
3. What are the effects of good time management practices on the successful completion of the sandwich programmes by students?
4. What is the role of lecturers/supervisors on the successful completion of sandwich programmes by students?

## **Significance of the study**

Typically, time management is an important tool that is very useful and productive in the lives of individuals and organizations. Everyone lives within the same framework of time which is given to them over a period of time. The purpose of this study is to help identify the causes of students' inability to graduate within the time stipulated time. This study will help students know the possible causes of their inability to complete the course of study. Lecturers/Supervisors will also know the possible causes of the inability of some students to graduate on time and how best to put measures in place to minimize and to eradicate such challenges.

The research will again contribute to the existing knowledge already available and challenge others who are interested in this particular study to research further into it. This will help in properly addressing the issue.

## **Delimitations**

The study confines itself to only two major stakeholders, namely the sandwich students at UEW and their Lecturers. The specific focus was on students who were unable to complete their programme in the stipulated time given. This is to help find out what went wrong in the management of their time.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The M.Ed Educational Administration Programme**

The University of Education, Winneba started its sandwich programmes in 1998 after an approval was given by the Academic Board of the University at their Regular meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1998. Sandwich programmes at the University of Education, Winneba started at the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS) with the mandate to train and provide the environment for excellence in teaching, learning and research in Management and Administration of Higher Education in Ghana.

Students pursuing the M.Ed Educational Administration and Management programme are usually males and females from all walks of life, of different age groups who are working in both the Public and Private sector. They are usually required to possess a good first degree with at least, a second class division with at least two years post qualification experience in any

of the Education biased programmes. The first degree can practically be in any field of education and from a recognized University anywhere in the world or its equivalent. Most of the students admitted into the programme are workers from the Public Sector mainly Ghana Education Service (GES) and others like research and advocacy groups. The sandwich programme which is supposed to be a full semester (16 weeks) programme but had been compressed into a ten (10) week programme, needs a lot of sacrifice, determination and the skill of time management to complete the programme successfully. As a result, students on this programme have to work hard and be studious before a student can make the High grade point. Any student who does not have good grades and do not satisfy the minimum grade point average in their course work is withdrawn. This puts pressure on the students who are mostly parents, opinion leaders in their communities as well as holding various positions in their places of work. Because of these responsibilities put on them, they are somewhat unable to combine effectively and make good use of the limited time at their disposal to study and make good grades that they need for graduation. The graduation requirement is that students should pass all taught courses and project work. Their overall grade points average must not follow below 3.00. This makes it tedious enough for most students to graduate.

### **The Concept of Time Management**

Scholars in the field of organizational leadership have identified time managements as one of the most important processes that lead to more productive outputs in both individual and institutional endeavors (Afful-Broni, 2008). It has become obvious that time management is very important in effective administration of leadership. Time management cuts across all spheres of life and as a result, adults have to combine their roles and responsibilities such as pursuing degree while still holding on to their jobs. To be able to judiciously combine all these roles effectively, one needs to have the skill of proper time management. It is rightly said "Time and tide wait for no one". People who waste much time in performing their duties and responsibilities are the ones who fail to create an identity of their own. According to Afful – Broni, (2008), time management refers to managing effectively so that the right time is allocated to the right activity.

According to Carrison (2003), Time refers to the totality of every period; past, present and future. Time is a totality of all years of the past, present and the future and its possibilities. Time is one of the fundamental bases on which all cultures rest and around which all activities revolve (Hall, 1990; pg. 179).

Time, according to Atkinson (1990), is a managerial asset which is neither replaceable nor retrievable. It is the view of Staffon (1990), that, time is a scarce resource which must be managed well so as to get the best out of it. Scott (1998), also viewed time with this line of thinking when he suggested that time is a valuable resource shared democratically to all human beings in equal quantity and that nobody hoards time, borrow time or steal time.

Time management is a set of principles, practices, skills, tools and systems that help one use their time to accomplish what they want (Staffon, 1990). Time management is what one does with their precious time. According to Afful-Broni (2008), "time management is what will allow us to carefully take charge of the moments that we have, while we have them, in order to effectively achieve our goals". This time management concerns how we handle ourselves, doing our best to accomplish our task while having in mind that we do not have all the time at our disposal. Estes 2007 cited in Afful-Broni (2008), perceived Time management as the art

of arranging, organizing, scheduling and budgeting one's time for the purpose of generating more effective work and productivity.

### **Importance of Time Management**

Time management is important for personal life and career success. It teaches how to manage your time effectively and make the most of it. Sasson (2008) outlined some of the reasons why Time management is important. These are:

- i. Time is a special resource that cannot be stored or saved for later use. Everyone has the exact amount of time each day. Time not well used cannot be retrieved.
- ii. Most people feel like they have too much to do and not enough time. They blame lack of time for their poor finances, unachieved goals, bad relationships and not exercising their body. Wise time management can help you find the time for what you desire to do or need to do.
- iii. You need time to get what you want out of life. If you wait for extra time to appear, you might lose the game of life. Through right time management, you can "create" the time you need, and not just wait for it to come. By planning your time wisely, you will have more time to do more things.
- iv. Time management will help you set up your priorities.
- v. Time management helps you make conscious choices, so you can spend more of your time doing things that are important and valuable to you.
- vi. You can learn to find the time for the things that are important to you. Even a small amount of time once a day, or even once a week, will take you closer to your goals, and you will be surprised at the progress you make.

According to Afful-Broni (2000), time management is about getting more value out of one's time and using it to improve the quality of one's life. It is the skill few people master but it is one they need badly. It is a conscious decision where individuals decide what is important and then plan their time and lives ahead. Effective Time management requires us to actively clarify our priorities. This brings peace and balance in our lives. Whatever the definition of success, Time management is at its core.

### **Barriers to Effective Time Management**

The barriers to effective time management are enormous. Barriers or impediments to effective time management are operationalised as any interference that results in not spending time optimally. Afful-Broni (2008), viewed the ability to identify these impediments as a good step towards knowing what to avoid and how to avoid them if we are to succeed in achieving effective time management. Tytel (2011) believes that there are two (2) types of barriers to effective Time management – Internal and External.

Internal barriers were explained as factors like discipline and procrastination and External barriers as issues like an individual's own workload and available corporate resources. According to Price (1996), a person who has the best intention when it comes to time management may still face some barriers. It is therefore prudent to identify common time management barriers in order to overcome them.

In an article written by Miller, (2009), on “Should students work part-time during their school year?” Miller found out that working requires that people have lots of time on their hands, and as a matter of fact their minds can handle the extra amount of work in their lives. Schooling requires that students should be timely, attentive and focused on their school work. A person who therefore has to do both school and work at the same time has a huge burden on his or her shoulders. This point to the fact that adult students have a difficult time in school especially when still working. Although work can be a great addition to a student’s repertoire of skills and experience, it can lead to getting lower grades and not being able to complete one’s project.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Population**

The research covered those M.Ed sandwich students in the Department of Administration and Management who could not complete their programme in the stipulated Two (2) years, and had to apply for extension. The total number of those who could not complete their programme and had to be registered for the Sandwich programme in the Department were 217.

### **Research Design**

This research is a descriptive research of the survey type. The survey involved the use of an investigator-designed Questionnaire to collect necessary information on the students. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the sampled students for their responses to the questions raised on the various components of Time Management and their inability to complete the programme in the stipulated time. The responses were then analysed.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The population for this study consisted of all M.Ed Sandwich Students on the Administration and Management programme. However, the target population was those student who could not complete their programme within the stipulated time. A simple Random Sampling technique was used to select respondents from the registered students list at the Academic Affairs Section of the University. Every third name on the list was selected as a respondent. A sample size of 85 students were selected for the study, and 10 lecturers or supervisors were also interviewed. The lecturers were selected purposively.

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

The instruments used for the data collection were questionnaire and interview schedules. The questionnaire were administered to the student and the supervisors were interviewed.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data was collected and analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages for items eliciting information on Sex, Age, Occupation, Marital status, Employment and social status of respondents. The Age and sex distribution shown in table 1 indicates that 43.5% of the respondents were male and 56.5% represent females. Fifty two (52) students representing 61.2% of the respondents were within the age group of 30-39 years whilst only 15 students representing 17.6% of the respondents were aged 40 years and above. Eighteen (18) students representing 21.2% of the respondents were below the ages of 30 years.

**Table 1:**

Age	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
20-24	2	1	6
25-29	6	9	15
30-34	11	19	30
35-39	11	11	22
40-44	4	6	10
45-49	3	2	5
Total	37 (43.55)	48 (56.5%)	85 (100%)

**Age and Sex Distribution of the Students**

Source: Fieldwork (2014)

**Table 2a:**

Sex	Marital			Total
	Single	Married	widowed	
Male	10	26	1	37
Female	11	35	2	48
Total	21	61	3	85

**Sex and Marital Status**

Source: Fieldwork (2014)

**Table 2b**

Age Group	Male			Female			Total
	Single	Married	Widowed	Single	Married	Widowed	
20 - 24	2	-	-	1	-	-	3
25 - 29	2	4	-	2	7	-	15
30 - 34	3	8	-	4	15	-	30
35 - 39	-	10	1	3	7	1	22
40 - 44	1	3	-	-	5	1	10
45 - 49	2	1	-	1	1	-	5
Total	10	26	1	11	35	2	85

**Sex, Age and Marital Status**

Source: Fieldwork (2014)

**Note:** For the purpose of this research, students who were either divorced or separated were counted as single.

**Table 3:**

Sex	Employment Sector				Total
	Private Institutions	Public Institutions	Self employed	Unemployed	
Male	10 (11.8%)	24 (28.2%)	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	37 (43.5%)
Female	7 (8.2%)	36 (42.4%)	2 (2.3%)	3 (3.5%)	48 (56.5%)
Total	17 (20.0%)	60 (70.6%)	3 (3.5%)	5 (5.9%)	85 (100%)

Sex and Occupational Status of Students

Source: Fieldwork (2014)

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research revealed that most students were engaged in other responsibilities such as having families and working full time. Those who were married were living with their spouses and in some cases with their younger siblings and other relatives. Some students who were single, especially the females had children to take care of. The effect of this is that, it could lead to inability for students to concentrate fully on their thesis because they may have to attend to their husbands/wives and also do household chores. The other area of responsibilities could be attending to the needs of their children and other visitors to the home.

It is also imperative to note that, there are situations where students performed various roles in society in addition to the studies. It implies that their attention will be focused more on the roles they perform instead of looking at what they are actually doing in their career. Extended family commitments also contributed to the difficulty in the completion of their project work by students.

It again came to light that most of these students were working full-time and some do even work overtime. This especially happens with those in the Financial Institutions whose work was very demanding.

When students are out of work, it does not end there because students attend to some other duties in addition to their academic work and this becomes very hectic and stressful for them. The effect is that it could lead to inability of the student to complete the project work. The stress that comes with their jobs was very demanding and this made students procrastinate the writing of the project report. This normally happens with those who work in the private institutions. The research found out that some students had poor time management skills. Some student workers in attempt to please their superiors worked overtime. This may have negative effect on the students and influence their ability to complete the project work on schedule.

This apart, some students also work on weekends and that stresses them the more. It was also realized that most of the students travelled in between Lectures to attend to family calls and duty, this also took a lot of their time and delay them in their work.

The research made a finding that some barriers to inability to complete their thesis was procrastination. Students do wait till they are called upon to submit their topics before they do so. This is partly due to the fact that students have serious work challenges and that is because about ninety percent (90.6%) of the students are full Time workers, and do not manage their time well so they are unable to meet the deadline for project submission. The effect is that the



situation stresses students up such that the approach will not be good enough. This leads to inability to complete one's thesis at the stipulated time.

### **Engagement in Extra Curriculum Activities**

Extracurricular activities are activities performed by students and that fall outside the realm of the normal School Curriculum or career engagements. These activities are outside the school curriculum and cause students to be much occupied. Occupying one's self with a whole lot of things may deter one from concentrating on one's academic work and hence may lead to late submission of dissertation.

One of the students admitted that engagement in extra activities has caused him the late submission of his project work.

Also, one female said:

*“Taking care of my husband, children, work and academic work is extremely tedious and will only be possible to complete the thesis within the stipulate time when you have an understanding husband”*

The researcher found out that about 78% of the students had other responsibilities such as; a secretary to an Association, Development committee member, An Assembly man, Union Leader/member at workplace, husband or wife. It emerged that most of the students who could not complete their programme in the stipulated time had other engagements which took greater percentage of their time instead of concentrating on their academic work.

### **Lecturers'/Supervisors' Assessment of Barriers to Early Completion of Project Work**

Sometimes, there is some level of bias in one's assessment of his strength and weakness, and some prejudice in the assessment of others. It was deemed worthwhile to consult the lecturers/supervisors of the students, to have a more balanced insight into the real challenges students face. The following were summarized from the interviews conducted with the different Lecturers:

#### **Nature of Their Jobs**

According to their supervisors, the nature of the students' job is one of the possible factors why students were unable to complete their work. Some jobs are demanding and so it posed a challenge to students. According to one lecturer, out of the twenty-eight (28) students assigned to him for supervision about sixteen (16) of them were working with companies/institutions which were giving them problems, in terms of allowing them the time to plan and combine their work with their studies.

#### **Procrastination**

The supervisors made mention of the fact that procrastination is one of the main factors that affects students. They indicated that students usually procrastinate their work right from the onset till the actual time they are required to finish working on their thesis. This, they said, is one of the barriers to their early completion of their project.

### **Lack of Proper Time Planning**

It was found out that, students do not plan their time well and this affects them in their studies. One lecturer commented:

*“It is quite difficult for students to combine their full time jobs with the Academic work”. He further explained that such student “do not know how to plan their time well as compared to those in Europe”.*

### **Poor writing skills**

The research revealed that, one of the barriers to students’ inability to complete their course was their poor writing skills. Again, some of the lecturers commented:

*“The crop of students we have now do not learn how to write well. This is because right from the Senior High School, they are not properly coached well enough to learn, to read and write properly on their own, this makes it difficult for them to learn, read and write on their own”.*

### **Conclusion**

The study set out to explore how effectively M.Ed student manage their time and consequently complete their programme on time. The research found out that most M.Ed students were full-time workers, involved in family issues and had other engagements. These involvements most of the time led to their inability to complete their thesis on time.

Improper time management of the students’ schedules and engaging themselves in so many activities including work and family issues make them tired and so leave their academic work behind, hence the late completion and submission of their thesis at the stipulated time. It can therefore be realized that students may not be able to complete their thesis because of their numerous engagements and improper management of their time. This is because time is of great essence to all students and a proper management without procrastination will serve students’ interest.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are made to help resolve the problem investigated.

#### **Scheduling**

The first step in managing time is to schedule it. **Universities often offer students free or** Students (respondents) should map out how they would spend the week between writing of their dissertation, social events and work, if applicable. Without blocking out research time, it is easy to get distracted by social activities and family. Along with designing the project time they should make notes of projects and homework to ensure they complete their work by deadlines (Tyle, 2011).

## **Organization**

Organization and time management usually go hand-in-hand. By keeping to the books, notebooks, folders and papers neatly organized, students can more easily find them when needed avoid wasted time looking for them. Organized notes are essential for effective use of project time. Academic support centers at universities often provide workshops on how to organize project notes for efficient and effective writing. Organized files can help students for that matter the respondents' better track work due and work completed and protects again looking for missing assignment (Tyle, 2011).

## **Prioritization**

The activities M.Ed students invest their time in offer a good depiction of how their life is prioritized. Keeping a weekly log of activities for their first few weeks can help students track how they spend their time. If they see that parties and finds or other forms of entertainment take away from adequately project time, they need to revisit their priorities.

Similarly, they should consider their work-school balance. If school is their main priority, they should communicate effectively with their employer that they need a schedule that allows for adequate class and dissertation writing time. They should not procrastinate on important issues like writing project, as that can lead to late or incomplete work, stress and ultimately project or dissertation writing failure (Tyle, 2011).

## **Efficiency Techniques**

If time management is a struggle, they need to pay a visit to their academic support center right away. They can receive one-on-one help from an expert on various time-management and efficiency techniques. They should learn how to write dissertation efficiently through reading and note taking tips, and discover methods for taking breaks to optimize their concentration. They can also learn how to complete work and papers more efficiently through idea mapping and outlining activities before they begin work on their projects. Practicing some specific efficiency techniques and mastering them can help build highly effective time-management habits (Lucier 2008).

## **Briefing their Stakeholders**

Part-time students (respondents) should inform their employers about the fact that a part-time M.Ed programme requires around 20 hours but that the actual amount of time they spend each week would vary according to what they are working on (dissertation). They should try to explain to their employers about the possible benefits to their job. They should tell their family and friends about the project/dissertation they are working on and why (Tyle, 2011).

The respondents should try to think about the possible skills, knowledge and even the connections they make with others. They should explain to their partners how the programme would increase their career prospects or give them more job security. If anyone around them understands why doing an M.Ed Sandwich programme is important to them, there is less opportunity for conflict to rise.

Sandwich students should try to move the work forward on many fronts simultaneously, rather than finish one chapter and starting another. They keep a 'menu' of ongoing work from which

they choose a task which fits the time and energy they have available. For example, data can even be collected whilst they work on literature review.

### **Assigning Supervisors**

Most part-time M.Ed students combine work and schooling, therefore the faculty where students study should actually assign students' supervisors' right from the first day of admission. The Faculty should encourage Part-time M.Ed students to start working on the thesis on time by simply having their topics ready before they enroll onto the programme. This will equip students to have enough information and alert them in terms of concentration of the project work.

### **Organize Seminars**

The Faculty should organize seminars for students so that they will have an idea of the research work they will be writing before completion. The seminars should be on general research from the onset so that student's concentration will be focused on what they will be writing. This will aid students to finish their work on time. The seminar should be a monthly kind of seminar (Tyle, 2011).

### **ICT Education**

Even though it is common knowledge that face-to-face supervision is far more useful, in this era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), students and supervisors should be encouraged to use modern ICT tools for their research. Students on their enrolment should be given ICT education and should be made to put it to practice. Both lecturers and students should be ICT literates such that e-mails of lectures would be given to students in order to send their work to them through the e-mail. This will make it easier for student-workers to do their thesis faster. It will stop them from commuting to see their project supervisors in order to supervise their research work.

### **Time Planning**

In addition to the above, students should be made aware of how important it is for them to plan their time well as they combine studies with work. The importance of planning should be clearly made known to them and make them aware, that despite all odds they are supposed to plan their studies very well in order get good grades and also to finish writing their thesis on time.

### **Areas for Further Research**

The possible areas that could be further researched on are first of all replicating the study in different departments that may also be offering part-time programmes. This will help researchers to know if managing one's time well in order to finish thesis is actually a general problem that cuts across many departments. The following areas for further research are suggested:

1. There should be further studies on how proper time management benefits part-time MBA students at KNUST to complete their thesis on time. Other universities should be considered as well in the next research work.

2. It should also be well investigated if students do their thesis without help from anywhere or any source. Students should be interviewed to go into detail about their thesis written. This will help identify if they research on the problem they have chosen and presented themselves.
3. There should also be research into improper time management and its effects on the completion of part-time MBA students' thesis at KNUST and other universities.
4. There should be further research into how part-time MBA students feel and cope when they are unable to complete their thesis on time.

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