

Importance of Managing with Multitasking for students

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Abstract

Stress is common function of today's life. To win the competitive life achieving things is compulsory for people. Particularly on part of students with so much pressure on achievement from parents and other counterparts stress is at higher level. They have to show their competence in all fields in addition to academics. Multitasking is the part of employment process today. One has to contribute something more than his own field at the work place also. Interviews are focusing on this aspect more than ever. What you could contribute to the organization other than your main field of work? This is the question to be answered by the candidate. In this situation a student has to focus on acquiring extra curricular qualifications in addition to the compulsory academic performance. What aspect to be chosen? What is best for the student? Which is the suitable field for the attitude and aptitude of the candidate? All these questions are to be answered with careful observation of teachers and parents. In these circumstances one cannot afford to keep away the child to lose place in society. The way is to socialize child properly into these multitasking situations. The present paper is focusing to throw light on multitasking and its effect on learning and living and helping students to manage life with these situations.

Introduction

Stress is a part of day to day life. Indeed, it is needed to bring work to completion. Without imposition human beings are never going to complete a task, on presumption that if time is provided they are going to work better. Imposition leads to stress to achieve targets. For students with pressure on achieving more and more in the present day competitive world, stress starts from the moment they enter into nursery and gradually increases in level and become a part of life. Stress is a mental state where urge is there to achieve goals and set targets in a systematic, impeccable way and to prove one step ahead of others in maintaining quality in completing the task. 'If we analyse stress in proper perspective, stress is the aggregate of our physical, mental and emotional reaction to a situation. It is about the way we react to demands of time and situations. It is both surprising and interesting to understand that stress does not have only negative aspects to it. Positive stress is very essential in our life. The positive stress is a driving force which motivates us to achieve something.' (Singh, 2006) As long as a person keeps struggle to win the situation, stress is positive, but once person succumbs to the pressures and give up struggle to cope with the stress the negative effects of stress starts emitting. Learning and memory can be affected by stress. Although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability, too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems reduce self-esteem and may affect the academic achievement of students. Studies revealed that the amount of stress experienced by the students are desirable in

attaining good academic results, it is equally important to identify what constitute good and bad stress and how good stress can be enhanced and bad stress can be eliminated.

Reasons for Stress

There are many reasons and situations for stress to emerge. The reasons vary with age, level of study and level of employment. At every stage of life one has to face stress to win. We are focusing here on reasons of stress on students.

The cause of stress in school could be peer pressure, academic pressure, bullies, non-efficient diet, lack of sleep etc. an increase in these factors could prove negative to progression in students' life.

An adolescent student bears maximum stress in his life. Under peer pressure, they change their habits, lifestyles and many other things in order to develop identity and come into conflict with elders and teachers.

As the students move to college or pre-university level the reasons for stress emerge due to absence of time management, entirely different climate in campus, a new understanding of relationships, fiercely competitive academic atmosphere etc. These causes of stress are typically dependant on their age, environment, field of study and aspirations.

Academic factors cause stress in almost all students irrespective of their level. Increasingly tough academic assignments and environment are identified as major causes to cause stress among students. Non-academic causes of stress among students are peer pressure and dating. While both these exert positive pressure up to some extent, it gets negative when limits are crossed.

Workload is another big reason for stress building. Students struggle to cope with increasing workload with increase in standard and they cannot maintain time between curricular and extra-curricular areas also. However, situation improves from school to college as situation demands better grades in all the subjects along with impressive record of co-curricular activities. Age-wise maturity coupled with parental guidance may also help in improving the situation.

Time management is another major cause. It is lack of time management that causes a lot of stress in students. Involvement in many activities same time also is one reason. Expectations from students are so high that a student has to involve in various activities due to changing evaluation patterns, like continuous comprehensive evaluation systems of CBSE. These situations emphasize accurate time management, lack of which may result in lower results.

Parents are also pressure creators in a student's life. Exorbitant wishes among parents for the best results from their child create a high pressure situation. Though parents always look forward to a better future and career for their children, they end up putting them under huge stress caused due to unusually high expectations.

Eventhough most of the students are resourceful enough to tackle all the issues in their lives, they find it very difficult to cope with such situations due to lack of training and support from context. The ongoing discussion is focusing on multitasking as a stress factor in present day situations.

Multitasking in General

Multitasking can be defined as capacity to handle more than one task at the same time. It is derived from computer engineering industry, where the ability of microprocessor to process several tasks simultaneously is considered as multitasking. When humans are involved in this, it is called human multitasking. Gradually the term has got extension to human beings involved in finishing off more than one work at same time. During 1990's, it has been shown that multitasking is not an enhancer and promoter of effectiveness.

*Junco and Cotten*¹ examined affects of multitasking on academic success and found that students who engaged more in multitasking reported more problems with their academic work. Research on the brain's role in multitasking revealed, almost otherwise facts than encouraging aspects. Because the brain cannot fully focus when involved in multitasking, people take longer to complete tasks and are found to err. When presented with much information, the brain is forced to pause and refocus continuously as one switches between tasks.

However, the process of adaptive executive control prioritizes tasks to maintain resemblance of order. The brain better understands this order so can therefore be trained to multitask. A study published in *Child Development* by *Monica Luciana*¹, associate professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota, discovered that the brain's capability of categorizing competing information continues to develop until ages sixteen and seventeen. Perhaps if people are trained to multitask at an early age, they will become efficient at multitasking. The research team found that with training, the brain can think and perform certain tasks more quickly, effectively allowing time for another task. However, the study also suggests that the brain is incapable of performing multiple tasks at one time, even after extensive training. This study further indicates that, while the brain can become adept at processing and responding to certain information, it cannot truly multitask. People have a limited ability to retain information, which worsens when the amount of information increases.

Researches revealed that youth in today's world exhibit high levels of multitasking, most experts believe that members of the Net Generation are not any better at multitasking than members of older generations. The brain can be shaped by experience *Klopf*¹ (1982). *Dr. Edward Hallowell*¹, in a 2005 article claimed that Attention Deficit Trait exists because of cramming of things, can be controlled only by creatively engineering one's environment and one's emotional and physical health. Limiting multitasking is essential.

Criticism on Multitasking

Multitasking has been criticized as a hindrance to completing tasks or feeling happiness. *Barry Schwartz*¹ has opined that the media-rich landscape of the Internet tempt people to

hook to a constant sea of information with too many choices, which may have a negative effect on human happiness. According to recent scientific study, multitasking comes with a cost (*Evans, Meyers & Rubenstein¹, 2001*). When we switch between complex tasks we are forced to spend more time to complete the transition. If we raise the complexity or the number of tasks, the overall result is that more time is required to complete each transition, and the time expense is increased if the task is unfamiliar.

Clifford I. Nass¹, a professor of psychology at Stanford University said that heavy multi-taskers are often extremely confident in their abilities, but there's evidence that those people are actually worse at multitasking than most other people. In a famous paper in 1956, *George A. Miller¹* suggested that humans' working-memory capacity—that is, their ability to juggle facts and perform mental operations—is limited to roughly seven units. Beyond that point, they estimate. Likewise, when people are asked to repeat an unfamiliar sequence of numbers or musical tones, their limit on a first try is roughly seven. *Meyer¹* has done much to explain how and why multitasking degrades performance. In a series of papers a decade ago, he and his colleagues determined that even under optimal conditions, it takes a significant amount of time for the brain to switch from one goal to another, and from one set of rules to another. Multitasking might also be taking a toll on the economy. One study by researchers at the University of California at Irvine monitored interruptions among office workers; they found that workers took an average of twenty-five minutes to recover from interruptions such as phone calls or answering e-mail and return to their original task. Discussing multitasking with the *New York Times* in 2007, *Jonathan B. Spira¹*, an analyst at the business research firm Basex, estimated that extreme multitasking—information overload—costs the U.S. economy \$650 billion a year in lost productivity.

Learning and Multitasking

Multitasking changes the way people learn. *Russell Poldrack¹*, a psychology professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that multitasking adversely affects the way of learning. Even if one learns while multitasking, that learning is less flexible and more specialized, so you cannot retrieve the information as easily. Media multitasking—that is, the simultaneous use of several different media, such as television, the Internet, video games, text messages, telephones, and e-mail—is clearly on the rise, as a 2006 report from the Kaiser Family Foundation showed: in 1999, only 16 percent of the time people spent using any of those media was spent on multiple media at once; by 2005, 26 percent of media time was spent multitasking.

People who have achieved great things often credit for their success a finely honed skill for paying attention. *William James¹*, the great psychologist, believed that the transition from youthful distraction to mature attention was in large part the result of personal mastery and discipline—and so was illustrative of character.

Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) studies have a lot to say about how the mind processes information and stands in contrast to the “techno-tasking” (*Simon¹, 2005*). In brief there are four principles of CIP. 1). The human mental system has a limited capacity. 2). A control mechanism is required to process, encode, store and retrieve

information. 3). There is a two-way flow of information where the mind uses stored information to make sense of newly acquired information. 4). Humans have been genetically predisposed to process and organize information in specific ways (Huitt,¹ 2003). This fourth point is supported by the work of Pavio¹ (1991) and Mayer (1994) and the tenets of the *Dual Coding Theory* which stress that modes need to be complementary with conceptual and temporal overlap between the information presented in each modality and even suggests that learning may be diminished if this is not the case. Then how to make students adapt to multitasking?

Multitasking and Educational Outcomes

Evidence is mixed regarding whether multitasking is positive or negative for individuals, especially youth. Some suggest that although it does allow us to engage in more activities at once, multitasking is not without costs; no matter how good individuals become at multitasking, they might not ever be as effective and efficient as when they do one thing at a time (Jackson¹, 2008). Being in a state of constant partial attention from multitasking, individuals increase the mental work necessary to switch back and forth between activities (Jackson¹, 2008). Mayer and Moreno's¹ (2003) research-based cognitive theory of learning and information overload suggests that multitasking may also have a negative impact on learning. There are three kinds of attention demands during the learning process: essential processing refers to the basic attention processes required for learning (i.e., focusing on the information to be learned), incidental processing is not required for learning and instead refers to extraneous variables in the learning experience (for instance, adding music to a presentation and the music is an extraneous variable that engages incidental processing), and representational holding, which is analogous to working memory (cognitive resources being used to remember information for the learning process). Mayer and Moreno's¹ (2003) integrated theory of learning states, and their research shows, that humans have a finite amount of cognitive processes available at any one time and that these processes can be overloaded. Once these processes are overloaded, deeper processing and learning cannot occur.

A study on instant messaging on students while involved in academic work revealed that involvement in messaging and chatting while doing school work or home work had a detrimental effect on academic performance. Women were reported to show more detrimental effect of multitasking on their school work. However, older students reported less impact of multitasking on academic work. The research concluded that Eventhough multitasking is proved negative; students adopted this at such higher levels that it became a part of their personality. (Junco & Cotton¹, 2010)

Multitasking as a Necessity

Multitasking for the present discussion context is taken as involvement of students in different activities of academic and non academic nature. In order to gain score in present days of continuous and comprehensive evaluation students have to perform many activities in forms of projects, assignments, role plays etc. They have to search the internet and join groups to gather information for the above said activities. In addition according to existing social conditions and craze of reality shows recognizing performance they have to excel in sports, arts like drawing, dance etc. Therefore,

students have to adopt multitasking techniques by imposition. One has to struggle to achieve success. So we have to accept the fact that multitasking is necessary.

Whatever research says about multitasking and its effects on brain processing and learning, it has to be adopted as a part of today lifestyle. The rapidly changing circumstances of academic and employment scenarios are emphasizing on adapting to multitasking from the beginning. At least an awareness of the concept is to be developed in students. Particularly in academic life there is so much tension to achieve grades and excellence in all fields. With number of children getting reduced in families, parents want the child to excel in all possible fields of study. The competitive environment of admissions in professional courses and getting employment later is giving emphasis to this aspect more than any other factor. It is understood that stress is positive to some extent. The same way multitasking is also necessary to some extent. As research findings suggest one has to train and focus brain to perform tasks, even one by one within the given time. The question now is how to adopt students to the process of multitasking in a proper way, with less stress and strain. One cannot avoid it. Everyone expect student to show excellence in academic and non-academic aspects. The future situations are not promising any guarantee of employment basing on one qualification. That is to say, if a child becomes engineer, doctor or other professional its employment may not be in the same field. The persons are opting to be innovative in starting or venturing into new areas of living. IIM students' ways of starting new ventures of simple gardening as a form of living, forgoing lucrative job offers are one example. To educate child into these innovative ways of living in future multitasking is one way of training to adapt to these situations. With technologies and internet evolution, this has become a fact and fad of life. So we have to think of ways of adopting it properly. Time management is the most needed skill for students to adopt multitasking properly in their way. It is identified as a major factor for reducing stress related to academics in students also. Besides stress management also helps them to face situations bravely.

Time Management

Time management is the most important skill for success in life. If oriented to this aspect from beginning a person can achieve success in life. Students when advised and encouraged to practice time management skills to finish off different tasks of academic and non-academic nature under proper guidance from parents and teachers can become better managers later. It needs good amounts of effort from person on their own. No one can make them learn the skill until they decide to put it in practice. In these days of fierce competition one has to excel in many fields related to focus field of study and employment through proper time management. Lack of efforts on part of person does not help.

Time management is one of those skills no one can teach in school but one has to learn on own practice. It doesn't matter how smart you are if you can't organize information you cannot learn. It doesn't matter how skilled you are, laziness keeps you from getting your work done on time. At study and workplace one can differentiate oneself by showing an ability to handle information and manage time. Let us examine some tips or guidelines from experts in this effort.

1. Do not leave information unprocessed for long. One has to use it quickly and finish off the work and proceed to next. Take action as soon as you get the information.
2. Try to limit the activities to the time available. Without thinking of time schedule do not give promises to take up tasks to any one. Limit the multitasking to your level, as excessive multitasking decreases efficiency and failure is going to be imminent. Practicing mindfulness is important in order to break the multitasking habit.
3. Prioritize the tasks to work on a time schedule. Brain works better when tasks are organized one by one. Try to organize things on basis of priority and work to achieve goals. This helps you to proceed in organized way, but prepare to face sudden changes.
4. Check your availability to involve in activities. It is not necessary to accept all the activities and wishes of elders because they are to be obeyed. Know your time and ability, interest and accept the task. A student has many compulsory and important curricular and school related activities to complete to clear the studies.
5. Organize all your schedules and things at proper places. Demand for place to work. Searching for things at last moments confuse and frustrate people and results in low performance.
6. Keep a schedule for all your tasks. One knows best about their mental set up to take up a task. Accordingly set a schedule to perform tasks and follow it religiously. You have to manage to keep the time kept for one task free so as to perform the task. Identify your best time to perform a best task.
7. Save time by identifying tasks that can be performed at the same time with less switch of attention. It will save time and energy. Planning all the internet related activities for most of the related subjects at same time save time, than attempting to search at different times.
8. Have a strong will to start the tasks. It is easy to finish off tasks but hard to start them. Break the tasks into simple parts and start to finish them.
9. Time to time organize all the tasks. The priorities change with time and necessity of the context. It is better to look into tasks of each day and divide them accordingly. Keep a notice board in your room to make a note about tasks to be performed on priority.
10. Know where to be fast and where to be slow. We prioritize things for this purpose. We have to be slow with high priority task and can dare to be slow with others.

Students at the tender age onwards are to be oriented and guided by parents to manage time to finish off tasks. Parents are to be strong enough to inculcate these skills. Otherwise it results in taking up activities without plan and leaving them in the middle without result. This may result in negative attitudes towards academic and other

activities later. Guidance and counseling are a must for students to properly choose and organize tasks.

Stress Management

Stress management techniques help students to cope with task management. Sudden changes and circumstances tend to effect the time management. So students are to be habituated to stress management techniques, like Yoga. Here are some tips that can be of immense help for students in dealing with stress:

1. To get over stress one has to accept that success and failure are the part of life. They are going move away. One has to continuously move to maintain life. Nothing is permanent and fleet away. These are necessary parts of life that teach valuable lesson to protect and consolidate the future. Parents are to be vigilant and counsel their wards against sudden unanticipated failures.
2. Multitasking is a demand of present day life. It is better to keep things a bit organized. It works in different ways for different people. Remembering work and keeping to time schedule helps a lot. There is always so much to do for a student; so it is fruitful to understand how to avoid some works which are not a part of their academics.
3. Time management skills hold immense significance for a student. Demand of the time is excellence in both scholastic as well as co-scholastic aspects of education. It is better to have a proper time plan to adhere to the demands and schedules, so that unnecessary stress does not come your way.
4. Always select the suitable environment for you to start study and do tasks. Because starting of task is important. Laziness should not be there. So select suitable time and environment to start the work. What is more important is to get into the mood of studying; it makes the things a bit easier.
5. Try to use relaxing techniques like walking, listening to music and going to sleep to relax mind. One has to choose own style of study and relaxation.
6. Memorisation of subject matter again is of sheer importance for students of all levels. Regular revisions of lessons play a big role in memorizing things successfully.
7. Plan for things according to budget available to you. If the task is not handled after start it is demotivating and affects the morale of student. One has to properly handle the money matters to finish off tasks successfully. Adhere with your budget to tasks that are of prime importance.
8. Study demands a hard core schedule of work. One has to prepare body and mind to face it. Proper nutrition, exercise and sleep are necessary. It is usual for students to study during odd hours also. To keep fit is the best way to beat stress. It is now proven fact that seven hours of sound sleep is needed to relax one's body. Even a nap of maximum one hour proves good stress buster. At the same time a good balanced diet and aversion to harmful substances has to be there.
9. One good way to tackle stress is different sorts of relaxation methods. Meditation, yoga, deep breathing practices and many other activities are getting increasingly popular and are for long proven to be true. One more thing which is highly helpful in de-stressing students is good whole hearted talk with some near or dear one. Talking of stress with someone who can listen intently makes it easy

to understand how to accept and fight it.

More than students, parents and teachers are to be aware of these facts to protect their children from detrimental effects of stress and lack of time management.

Conclusion

More and more materialistic ways of life, acute competition, and lack of values in achieving goals of life are developing pressures in society. Societal aspects also influence the lives of students. Because professional life is starting in society for which training is given in schools. Therefore parents are wishing to bring in success by hook or crook into the lives of the children. When societal pressures the situations become more demanding and resulting in grave situations of suicides also. It is the reality of present day competitive society.

Parents have to play a special role in children's lives to bust away stress. Through a specific planning they have to organize the environment and resources for developing the future of the child. With purposeful groundwork and careful handling of the situation, they can help beat every kind of stress among students. In fact, it is the very responsibility of parents along with teachers to mould the children in such a way that they turn out to be healthy, productive and spirited individuals. Particularly working parents have to spend a good amount of time by carefully scheduling their tasks. They can make the child to understand the abilities in real sense. This will develop the strength and will to take up activities in students. A strong will make them keep firm and proceed to end with success. This is possible only with good parenting on part of elders.

Quick and proper decision making is necessary in today's changing world of work. It comes only from a constructive and positive way of thinking. Parents through their honest upbringing can instill in their children a positive thought process. Positive thinking, calmness to face adversities, compassion towards others abilities are some of needed qualities in child to solve problems in life. Actually the qualities of resilience, self-estimation and positive thinking just do not come out of words and methods only. Nutritious food along with proper exercise and proper rest is essential to cultivate these qualities. It is obligatory on parents to understand their role in shaping the life of their child. It is just not enough to pile up burden of expectations and watch it out from the stands.

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