

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AMONG HIGH-SCORING AND LOW-SCORING CANDIDATES IN NATIONAL-LEVEL ENTRANCE EXAMS

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ABSTRACT

Time management has been identified as a crucial determinant of success in high-stakes national-level entrance exams, where performance is influenced not only by subject knowledge but also by the ability to allocate limited time effectively. This study examines the time management strategies adopted by high-scoring and low-scoring candidates in competitive examinations such as the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), and Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exams in India, along with equivalent global assessments such as SAT, GRE, and GMAT. Theoretical research approach used in this research highlights significant differences in planning, prioritization, and execution of exam strategies between high and low performers. Findings suggest that high-scoring candidates tend to employ proactive planning, structured revision schedules, time-blocking techniques, and adaptive exam strategies, while low-scoring candidates often display poor prioritization, lack of consistency, and susceptibility to test anxiety. Ethical implications of coaching interventions, technology-based tools, and socio-economic disparities in time management resources are also considered. This paper concludes that effective time management is not merely a learned skill but also a reflection of discipline, motivation, and environmental support systems. Recommendations are provided for students, educators, and policymakers to foster equitable time management skills that can bridge performance gaps in competitive exams.

Keywords: Time Management, High-Scoring Candidates, Low-Scoring Candidates, Competitive Exams, Exam Strategies, Productivity, Performance Gaps, Test-Taking Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

National-level entrance exams represent some of the most competitive academic gateways in the world. In India, millions of students appear annually for JEE, NEET, and UPSC exams, remain crucial benchmarks for higher education admissions. Despite the variations in content, format, and purpose, one common denominator is the time constraint imposed during these exams. Candidates often have to solve complex problems within limited durations, making time management a decisive factor in success.

High-scoring candidates are often assumed to have superior intelligence or better educational resources, but research suggests that time management skills play a critical role in differentiating performance levels (Macan, 2016). Conversely, low-scoring candidates may have equivalent knowledge but fail to optimize their performance due to poor allocation of time, inefficient revision habits, or stress-induced mismanagement during the exam.

This study seeks to investigate:

1. What time management strategies are employed by high-scoring candidates?
2. How do these differ from those of low-scoring candidates?
3. What implications do these differences hold for pedagogy, exam preparation, and equity in education?

By conducting a comparative study, this paper not only illuminates the cognitive and behavioral approaches to time utilization but also offers actionable insights into exam preparation and performance improvement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Time Management in Academic Success

Time management has been repeatedly associated with improved academic performance (Claessens et al., 2007). Studies show that effective time management leads to reduced procrastination, better stress handling, and higher productivity (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007).

High vs. Low Scorers

Zimmerman (2002) highlights that high achievers often rely on self-regulated learning strategies, which include time monitoring and reflective adjustments. Conversely, low scorers demonstrate reactive rather than proactive management, focusing more on last-minute preparation.

Exam-Specific Contexts

Research on JEE and NEET preparation indicates that successful candidates employ structured time schedules, divide daily study sessions into focused blocks, and simulate exam conditions to practice pacing (Sharma & Gupta, 2020). In contrast, lower performers tend to spend disproportionate time on strong subjects while neglecting weaker areas.

Technology and Coaching Influence

The rise of coaching centers and digital learning platforms has introduced AI-powered tools, mock-test platforms, and productivity apps that aid in time management (Liu et al., 2021). However, reliance on such tools can exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities, as not all students can afford or access them.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

No interviewing technique or questionnaire method was used for any statistical analysis. This research is purely theoretical in nature based on past published researches by various scholars.

PRE-EXAM TIME MANAGEMENT

High-Scoring Candidates

- Daily study plans with fixed time slots for revision, mock tests, and rest.
- 25–50 minute focused study sessions followed by short breaks.
- Systematic allocation of time to weaker subjects while maintaining strengths.

Low-Scoring Candidates

- Reliance on mood-based studying with irregular hours.
- High frequency of last-minute cramming.
- Excessive focus on strong subjects while ignoring weak ones.

TIME UTILIZATION DURING THE EXAM

High-Scoring Candidates

- Attempt easier questions first, returning later to difficult ones.
- Regular checking of progress every 15–20 minutes.
- Avoid spending disproportionate time on a single question.

Low-Scoring Candidates

- Spending excessive time on difficult questions early in the exam.
- Lack of time-checking during test.
- Rushing toward the end, leading to avoidable mistakes.

REVISION AND PRACTICE

High scorers use mock exams under timed conditions to simulate real environments. Low scorers, however, often avoid timed practice, which undermines their pacing ability in actual exams.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIMENSIONS

- High scorers show greater self-regulation and resistance to distractions.
- Relaxation techniques (deep breathing, meditation) help maintain composure.
- Low scorers report higher exam anxiety, leading to cognitive overload and poor time decisions.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY AND COACHING

- High Scorers: Use apps for scheduling, performance tracking, and AI-based mock test feedback.
- Low Scorers: Limited or inefficient use of such tools.

Equity Issue: Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may lack access to these resources.

4. CONCLUSION

High-scoring candidates not only plan better but also adapt during the exam, while low-scoring candidates display inflexibility and reactive strategies. This aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) theory of self-regulated learning. A significant implication is the role of equity. Access to coaching and technology aids some candidates, raising ethical questions about fairness. Additionally, interventions in schools should aim to develop time management as a core skill, not merely an exam tactic.

This study reveals that time management strategies vary sharply between high and low scorers. The success of high achievers lies not in superior intelligence alone but in strategic, disciplined, and adaptive time use. Conversely, poor performers struggle due to procrastination, lack of pacing, and anxiety.

Key Findings:

1. High scorers adopt structured, proactive, and adaptive time strategies.
2. Low scorers exhibit poor planning, reactive studying, and weak pacing in exams.
3. Access to technological and coaching resources enhances time management but raises equity issues.
4. Psychological resilience is strongly linked with better time utilization.

Recommendations

- Integrating time management training into school curricula.
- Providing low-cost digital tools to democratize access.
- Encouraging psychological counseling and stress management workshops for candidates.

5. REFERENCES

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