

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR PROPER GUIDANCE OF THE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Tertiary institution students are usually engaged with different academic tasks ranging from attending classes, writing term papers, carrying presentations, writing tests and examinations, embarking on field trips to writing their projects among other things. In carrying out all these academic tasks, it is needful that they do so timely and promptly in order to meet up with deadlines. However, some tertiary institution students sometimes either deliberately or not delay or avoid some of the tasks which they are duty bound to carry out; thereby resulting in academic procrastination. Thus, this work centered on understanding the dynamics of academic procrastination among tertiary institution students in Nigeria: The need for proper guidance of students. It basically explored in details the concept of academic procrastination, its types, prevalence, causes and consequences. Also discussed herein were the remedial measures which school administrators, lecturers, parents, general public etc can employ in order to guide students who engage in academic procrastination. Students who are victims of academic procrastination may also utilize the measures discussed herein in order to reduce or totally overcome the ugly phenomenon.

Keywords: Understanding, Dynamics, Academic Procrastination and Tertiary Institution

Introduction

Different students irrespective of their levels, programme of study, age, gender and race study in different ways and tend to attain different levels of academic achievement. Beyond studying, tertiary institution students also engage in frequent deadlines for payment of school fees, course registration, course selection, submission of assignments, reading for tests and exams etc. Hence, the way and manner they manage their time while carrying out the above tasks among other academic activities

remain very fundamental to their level of academic success; as time management by tertiary institution students is an important factor that contributes to their academic success. According to Hossein and Tahereh (2017), "time management especially at university is an important factor contributing to the academic success of students. However, majority of students relentlessly delay their academic work". Students at all levels of education must therefore, as a matter of necessity take their studies very seriously; by ensuring timely and prompt completion of their academic tasks as planned or deemed necessary by their instructors.

Though academic procrastination can also be perpetuated by lecturers/teachers and school administrators, the present work focused basically on the students; as they tend to engage more frequently in the act of academic procrastination. Therefore, there is need for school administrators, lecturers, parents, students themselves and the general public to have an in-depth understanding of what academic procrastination is all about, its types and dynamics, causes and consequences; thereby helping to guide students towards reducing and totally overcoming the practice of academic procrastination.

Conceptualization of Academic Procrastination

Etymologically, the term procrastination is derived from the Latin word-Procrastinare; meaning swallowing, delaying, pulling, pausing, stop moving or postponing a task. Basically procrastination according to Steel (2007) cited in Francis (2019) is composed of two generic words or parts-Pro which means forward, ahead or in support of and Crastinus which means tomorrow or up to tomorrow. In a general sense therefore, procrastination simply refers to the act of an individual delaying and postponing the performance of completion of a particular task within the specified/planned time. It is also regarded as task avoidance or task delay. Pourabdol, Sobhi-Gharamaleki and Abbasi (2015) cited in Hossein and Tahereh (2017) considered procrastination as a behavioral tendency in delaying what is necessary for achieving a goal. It is the process of postponing a work which has been decided to be performed or carried as planned. Procrastination is basically a behavioral defect or problem which is manifested in delaying a task or decision.

However, Chun-Chu and Choi (2005) cited in Ambrose (2018) maintained that procrastination is sometimes positively employed or utilized. Although Steel and Klingsieck (2016) stated that if worsening is expected following procrastination, thus purposeful, practical and positive delay are not considered as procrastination. Therefore, viewing procrastination from the positive perspective or application, Steel and Klingsieck regard it as a functional delay or rush avoidance. In the same vein, Çapan (2018) posited that although procrastination is not always a problem but in most cases it can be associated with undesirable and irrecoverable consequences through preventing from development and not the achievement of the goals.

What then is academic procrastination? Different scholars have given the definitions of academic procrastination. According to Francis (2019), "it is a situation in which a student or group of students unnecessarily postpone or delay the completion of academic activities or assignments; thereby resulting in rush and anxiety in carrying out or completion of such task". It is the process whereby students needlessly delay the completion of assignments or other academic tasks; thereby leading to not meeting the deadline, poor academic performance, fear and anxiety, stress etc.

In the opinion of Çapan (2018), academic procrastination is a relatively common phenomenon among adults and students in the universities. Rothblum, Solomon and Murakami (1986) cited in Hossein and Tahereh (2017), reported that academic procrastination is one of the commonest types of procrastination and it is the tendency that prevails on students to postpone academic activities. Rothblum, Solomon and Murakami therefore, maintained that academic procrastination is almost sometimes associated with anxiety. The examples of academic procrastination are endless and take diverse forms but for instance, a student who knows he/she has an examination in a week's time but will wait or delay studying until the night of the exam even though he/she keeps wanting to get started; resulting hurry and anxiety is said to be exhibiting academic procrastination. Another example of academic procrastination is a student who delays working on an assignment for an entire semester until the deadline is fast approaching. Other examples include the following: A student who wastes hours browsing social media before he/she finally manages to get started with his/her homework. A student who puts aside studying for a test coming up the next day but decided to engage him/herself with house chores.

It is imperative to stress that the concept of academic procrastination is not just restricted to students alone, other stakeholders within the school system also engage in the act of procrastinating. For example, a teacher is meant to read for his/her lesson but decided to keep delaying; thereby not reading or having limited time to read is said to have engaged in academic procrastination. This is corroborated by Hossein and Tahereh (2017) who observed that the concept of academic procrastination is sometimes used to refer to procrastination by other people involved in academic life. One of such examples of academic procrastination in this context is a lecturer who unnecessarily delays when it comes to preparing for an upcoming course or class. Similarly, a professor who keeps unnecessarily putting off writing an important grant proposal with an approaching deadline is said to have indulged in academic procrastination. However, this work is basically centered on academic procrastination as perpetrated by tertiary institution students.

Chu and Choi (2005) cited in Jill (2015), categorized academic procrastination in two types: passive and active academic procrastination. Passive academic procrastination occurs when a student is inactive or passive in completing academic tasks and at the same time experiences negative emotions while completing the task. However, active academic procrastination may not have a negative impact on a student's effectiveness. An active academic procrastinator might be exposed to short-term benefits when choosing to delay the completion of a task such as being able to work better under pressure. Thus, an active procrastinator has the ability to act on his/her decisions in a timely manner, knows the purposes of time, control and manages time as well as have appropriate coping styles. In essence, the difference between students who engage in active and passive academic procrastination lies on the ability to self-regulation. Active procrastinators exhibit successful time management skills and self-regulation while passive procrastinators exhibit deficits in these abilities.

The prevalence of academic delay or procrastination often exhibited by some tertiary institution students constitutes a serious challenge to the students themselves, university management, lecturers, parents and other stakeholders generally. According to Hayat, Jahanian, Bazrafcan and Shokrpour (2020), academic procrastination is highly prevalent among university students and it tends to affect different aspects of their personal and academic life. A study carried out by Hayat, Jahanian, Bazrafcan and Shokrpour revealed that

29.25% of the students in participated in the study had academic procrastination always, 47.9% of the students had high levels of procrastination, leading to permanent problems and reduction in academic achievement. Steel (2007) in his meta-analysis research cited in Jill (2015) revealed that 80% to 90% of undergraduate college students reported they experience or indulge in procrastination. Özer, Demir and Ferrari (2009) cited in Jill (2015) reported that 52% of tertiary institution students in Turkey self-reported frequent academic procrastination. More recently, Özer (2011) found that 53% of 150 undergraduate Turkish college students reported experiencing academic procrastination.

In Nigerian context, Francis (2019) reported that the incidence of academic procrastination among post-secondary school students in Nigeria has become a very serious problem to stakeholders in the system. Francis maintained that most students prefer waiting the last minutes before they could either do their assignments or read for their exams; a trend that posing a serious challenge to even the students themselves. In the same vein, Ambrose (2018) conducted a study involving 1320 university students in Nigeria and result clearly showed that 85% of the students agreed to be frequent and addictive procrastinators. Okafor (2017) in the same direction reported that over 65% of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are academic procrastinators.

Theoretical Framework

Temporal Motivation Theory (TMT) is an integrative motivational theory developed by Piers Steel and Cornelius Konig in 2006. The theory emphasizes *time* as a critical motivational factor and focuses on the impact of deadlines on the allocation of attention to particular tasks. The theory argues that as a deadline for completing an activity nears, the perceived usefulness or benefit of that activity increases exponentially. Temporal motivation theory is particularly useful for understanding human behaviors like procrastination and goal setting. It states that an individual's motivation for a task can be derived from the following formula: $Motivation = (Expectancy \times Value) / \{1 + (Impulsiveness \times Delay)\}$. In this equation, *motivation* is the desire for a particular outcome. *Expectancy* or self-efficacy is the likelihood of success; *value* is the reward associated with the outcome; *impulsiveness* is the individual's ability to withstand urges while *delay* is the amount of time until the realization of the outcome (i.e., the deadline). The greater an individual's expectancy for successfully completing a task and the higher the value of the outcome associated with it, the higher the individual's motivation will be. In contrast, both impulsivity and a greater amount of time before a deadline tend to reduce motivation.

For example, assuming a student has just two months to study for a final exam. Throughout the two months, he/she has two options of either studying or taking to social activities. Even though the student may enjoy socializing, he/she also needs to achieve a good grade when the final exam eventually comes up. At the beginning of the student's study period where there is a *long delay* before the deadline, the reward of studying is not immediate and as such has *low value*. Therefore, the motivation to study is lower than the motivation to socialize. However, as the study period diminishes from several weeks to several days, the motivation to study will surpass the motivation to socialize.

Causes of Academic Procrastination among Tertiary Institution Students

Several factors tend to interplay resulting in academic procrastination among students. Zacks and Hen (2018) posited that the tendency for a student to engage in academic procrastination can be attributed to a variety of factors or issues. Specifically, internal causes for academic procrastination includes-anxiety, fear of failure, perfectionism, task aversion, sensation seeking, feeling overwhelmed, physical or mental exhaustion, and lack of study or organizational skills. External causes of academic procrastination may include: poor study environment, lack of clear directions or expectations, lack of clear due dates, lack of communication (an instructor not responding to a student's requests for clarification), lecturers being too relaxed by not enforcing any deadlines in their course etc. In the same direction, Okafor (2017), maintained that academic procrastination is often times associated with students' anxiety, low conscientiousness and self-regulatory failure. Other reasons or factors responsible for academic procrastination include: fear of failure, dislike for academic tasks, laziness, lack of self-discipline as well as lack of study habits and time management.

More categorically, Kutlu and Saral (2016) grouped the causes of academic procrastination into two major factors: internal and external factors. The internal factors are those factors that emanate from students; as they are self-caused. It encompasses students' inability to manage time, failure in planned study habits, perfectionism, preferring frightening activities, the desire not to exhaust themselves, distractibility, fear of failure, attaching less value to academic tasks, lack of model instructors who perform their academic tasks, having the thought that academic tasks are boring, not finding the academic task interesting, lack of factors that motivate academic tasks, lack of good health and lack of good financial situation.

Internal factors according to Reynolds (2015) are those factors which are caused or emanate from the students themselves. One of the internal factors is locus of control. This refers to the extent or degree to which an individual student perceives that a reward follows from or is contingent upon his/her own behavior or attributes versus the degree to which he/she feels the reward is controlled by forces outside of him/her and may occur independently of his/her own actions. According to Beretvas, Suizzo, Durham and Yarnell (2008) cited in Reynolds (2015), perceiving an event as contingent on one's effort or ability marks an internal locus of control whereas perceiving it as contingent on luck, chance, fate or the control of other powerful things indicates an external locus of control. Thus, a student with an internal locus of control procrastinates lesser and completes his/her academic tasks earlier than those with an external locus of control. Other internal factors contributing to procrastination are factors that have a psychological component which is associated with procrastination. This includes: indecision, irrational beliefs about self-worth and personal standards, low self-esteem, low emotional intelligence, lack of self-motivation etc.

On the other hand, external factors are those which may be due the school and social-related environment where a student learns. It includes: causes resulting from physical conditions of the learner such as having disability, combining work and studies. Other external factors may be due to school management practices such as lack of constant power supply especially at night for students to read or complete needed tasks, lack of conducive learning environment etc (Kutlu and Saral, 2016).

External factors contributing to academic procrastination are those that originate outside the students or procrastinators. This includes-parenting style, school environment and school management leadership style. Permissive parents for instance, are caregivers who make fewer demands on their children than do other parents and allow for their children to regulate their own activities as much as possible. Authoritarian parents are caregivers who tend to be highly directive with their children and value unquestioning obedience in their exercise of authority over their children. Authoritative parents are caregivers who fall between these two extremes and provide clear and firm direction for their children but disciplinary clarity is moderated by warmth, reasonable flexibility, and verbal give-and-take. Thus, students or children who grew up under permissive parenting tend to exhibit lesser level of academic procrastination compared to their counterparts from authoritarian parenting. This is because they had grown up with the tendency of working independently (Reynolds, 2015).

Consequences of Academic Procrastination

Generally, academic procrastination appears to make university students postpone their academic work or delay in submitting their assignments during the entire course of studies. Students may become depressed and disturbed with low confidence level that affects largely on their learning and achievement. According to Irshad and Sarwat (2010), academic procrastination has negative effects on students' learning; resulting in their low achievements in examinations/test or even causes total failure. It creates fear of examinations/test; resulting in depression and anxiety as well as lowering students' morale. Academic procrastination leads to students' hesitation in starting their academic work; thereby making them lose their competition spirit. Students who procrastinate become prey to inferiority complex and consequently discontinue of their study.

Beyond having negative effect on students' academic well-being, it also has social effects on the students in terms of development of some negative tendencies among university students affecting their morality. Procrastinating students may find it difficult to manage time even after graduating from school. Academic procrastinators due to their failure often times search for short cuts in order to overcome their deficiencies; using unfair means. Low achievements and consistent failures develop hostile and intimidating attitude among university students which may result in developing insulting and aggressive temperament. Procrastination creates some unhealthy practices associated with some unaccepted social attitudes or values including addiction. Such problems develop demotivation among university students which may result in developing the habits of drinking, smoking and taking sleeping pills at nights which in turn make them passive, creating anxiety and depression and consequently; they may discontinue or withdraw or may even be withdrawn from school (Irshad & Sarwat, 2010).

Voge (2017) identified the negative consequences of procrastination to include feelings of anxiety and stress, fatigue and disappointment from falling below their own standards and having to put their life on hold for chunks of time.

Measures of Dealing with Academic Procrastination

There are several remedial measures that could be used to control academic procrastination among tertiary institution students. Reynolds (2015) maintained that in order to deal with the menace of academic procrastination among tertiary institution

students, the intervention should be in the area of reducing anxiety levels of the students. Irshad and Sarwat (2010) highlighted some of the measures to be taken in order to reduce the prevalence of academic procrastination among tertiary institution students to include: provision of proper guidance and counseling services at campuses; positive remarks/comments by lecturers on students' assignments, presentations, group work and other academic activities; provision of appropriate encouragement and reward to students on their good academic performance; developing and maintaining academic relationships with fellow students and lecturers; students sharing their academic problems with each other and to seek appropriate solutions through consultative process.

Voge (2017) observed that the negative consequences of academic procrastination cannot be over accentuated. Voge therefore, highlighted four basic measures of overcoming academic procrastination among students such as awareness, time management techniques, motivation and being actively engaged in classes.

Awareness: The first point of solving an existing problem is to be aware of its existence. Thus, in order to overcome academic procrastination, students need to have an understanding that it is a problem to them, know why they procrastinate and the dangers which procrastination could cause in their studies and future life. Hence, awareness and self-knowledge are the keys to figuring out how to stop procrastinating. Lecturers, parents, friends etc can as well help students in this regards. Having this insight helps in protecting students from feeling like they are not able enough and keeping it in mind when they are tempted to fall into familiar, unproductive and procrastinating habits goes a long way to solving the problem. In the same vein, Pychyl (2018) identified awareness as the first step in overcoming academic procrastination. Pychyl posited that when a student is able to notice when, why, and the likely consequences of procrastinating, the tendency to continue in procrastination is minimal.

Time management techniques: To overcome academic procrastination, time management techniques and tools are indispensable but they are not enough by themselves. Effective time management reduces anxiety, fear and emphasizes the satisfaction and rewards of completing tasks in good time. Thus, every student should set reasonable goals (manageable list of things to do), break big academic tasks down and allocate time to them.

Motivation: This has to do with a student finding productive reasons for engaging in academic tasks. Hence, to overcome academic procrastination, it is necessary for students to be self-motivated for productive reasons (learning and achieving positive, productive, satisfying feelings and actions). These reasons are in contrast to engaging in a task out of fear of failing or not making your parents angry or not looking stupid or doing better than other people to show off. A practical way to put positive motives in motion is for a student to set and focus on his/her goals.

Be active to be engaged: It requires a student to stay actively engaged in his/her classes. If a student is passive in class, he/she is very probably not getting into the course and its topics and that weakens his/her motivation. In the same vein Okafor (2015) stated that students who are very actively engaged in classes are less likely to procrastinate; as they are very much familiar with course content and could meet up with academic challenges when the need arises.

According to Zacks and Hen (2018) academic procrastination can be reduced by analyzing the situation, in terms of factors such as the number of students involved and the causes of their procrastination, and then implementing an appropriate solution, which

consists of interventions such as intermediate deadlines, automated reminders and self-regulation training. Zacks and Hen therefore, summarized the measures of overcoming students' academic procrastination into there-student-led approach, externally-led approach and joint approach.

Student-led approach. This involves students taking most of the responsibility for reducing their academic procrastination with little to no external guidance. External guidance in this case might as minimal as a lecturer mentioning the problem of procrastination and giving students a link to a relevant guide on the topic.

Externally-led approach. This involves stakeholders, such as educators or administrators using relevant anti-procrastination techniques to reduce students' procrastination without directly discussing the issue of procrastination with the students. For example, this can involve an instructor setting a series of intermediate deadlines for all students in their course.

Joint approach: This has to do with using both external guidance and having students take an active role in their attempts to stop procrastinating. For example, this can involve going over relevant anti-procrastination techniques with students, and helping them choose and implement their preferred ones.

Conclusion

Academic procrastination in this context is a situation where students unnecessarily delay or postpone academic tasks; thereby resulting in them working under pressure or not meeting up the deadline. Different factors tend to be responsible for academic procrastination; among which include-illness, social and family problems, lack of self-motivation and interest, students' self-overconfidence, laziness, negative attitude, lack of guidance and counseling services for the students. Academic procrastination is very common among students at all levels especially at the tertiary level and tends to be detrimental to all students who engage in it. It may create embarrassment and inferiority complex among students; it lessens confidence among students and their expectancy of completing a task; resulting in unhealthy sleep, diet and exercise habits. Academic procrastinators may yield to higher rates of smoking, drinking, digestive ailments, insomnia and cold. It increases a lot of stress as well as worry and fear; leading to shame and self-doubt. Academic procrastination among university students also results in depression, cheating in test/exams, plagiarism, higher use of alcohol, cigarette and caffeine.

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Paul Agbade Olofu and Fidelis Ashibekong Ukpanukpong (BSUJEM Vol. 3 No. 1 2021)
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