

RE-EVALUATING THE CONCEPT OF PROCRASTINATION AND THE REASONS WHY STUDENTS PROCRASTINATE; A THEORETICAL APPRAISAL

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### Abstract

This paper is a theoretical appraisal on rethinking the concept of procrastination and the reasons why students procrastinate. The norm in the case of education is to do work and learn in school. Although procrastination is a deviance of the norm of education, there are more students who procrastinate than students who get everything done as soon as it is assigned. The standard has been changed; it is now standard behavior to procrastinate since the majority of the social group participates. The problem of procrastination affects many students in secondary schools in Nigeria. On the other hand, many students do not know that their inability to read is problem of postponing their time to studies, but they are engaged more on pleasurable things in which they cannot benefits from it. The paper looked into the concept of procrastination, components of procrastination, and the theoretical framework like social learning theory of Fiske. The reasons why students procrastinate e.g. forgetting about it, lack of clarity about the desired outcome, resistance overly/ lenient deadlines, distractions, perfectionism, fear of failure etc finally summary, conclusion and recommendations.

**Keyword:** Re-evaluation, procrastination, students, distraction, resistance

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### Introduction

Procrastination is a relatively old phenomenon, as psychologist William James already recognized the emotional cost generated in people who suffered from it more than 120 years ago [20]. Lay (2018) pointed out that procrastination considers importance to the individual whose action is being postponed, while Milgram, Mey-Tal, and Levison (2019) discussed whether the performance of a task is voluntary or imposed, and Steel (2019) wondered whether the person is aware of the negative consequences of this postponement. Along these lines, Steel and

Ferrari (2017) defined procrastination as an insufficiency in self-regulation processes that causes the voluntary delay of planned activities or an ineffective lifestyle that leads to a failure in the fulfillment and commitment to set targets. In this light, procrastination involves the action of not finishing a task or finishing it late, and this process is generally accompanied by feelings of nervousness or restlessness, and discouragement. This habit is considered destructive since the cost of such behavior may cause psychological stress due to overexertion to meet deadlines, when not fulfilling responsibilities may lead to negative

consequences and when the positive consequences of performing the task are higher. Procrastination can be defined as the tendency to postpone and delay academic tasks or ignoring academic responsibility during the entire course of studies. The indicators of procrastination are postpone or delay to start doing of the task, delay finishing or submitting the assignments, pass over the deadline of task that has been planned and do other interesting activities than finishing the tasks. It is a common behavior that university students do during their academic period. For example, students postpone the preparation and submission of their assignments or presentations, completing projects, or even preparing their final examination. Research done by previous researchers found that 30% - 60% of university students report their regular postponement. Procrastination influence student's academic performance (Hussain & Sultan, 2010; Rabin, Fogel & Nutter-Upham, 2011) Universities already set the period of study and every student must finish their study during that period. Through academic period, university students have many obligations should be fulfilled. For some students, these obligations are considered as challenge. In the other hand there are many students making those obligations as obstacles should be avoided. (Adrianta & Tjundjing, 2007; Handaru, Lase, & Parimita, 2014; Hussain & Sultan, 2010). The present paper is on rethinking the concept of procrastination and the reasons why students procrastinate; a theoretical appraisal.

### **Procrastination**

Procrastination is an act everyone takes a part in everyday, regardless of their situation in life. Everyone from young junior high students to adults who have been out of school for a while participate in procrastination. Some people would say that it is a form of deviance because by definition deviance is "any violation of norms"

and avoiding what should be done is a violation of norms. In today's world of technology and the Internet, however, people procrastinate all the time. It seems that procrastination is now more of a social norm than a deviance. By definition a social norm is a "rule or standard of behavior shared by members of a social group." The norm in the case of education is to do work and learn in school. Although procrastination is a deviance of the norm of education, there are more students who procrastinate than students who get everything done as soon as it is assigned. The standard has been changed; it is now standard behavior to procrastinate since the majority of the social group participates. Obviously, the problem of procrastination affects many students in secondary schools in Nigeria. However, many students do not know that their inability to read is problem of postponing their time to studies, but they are engaged more on pleasurable things in which they cannot benefits from it.

Moreover, the students who studies their books perform better than those who are not serious. (Thomas, 2014). Laeus (2015) explains that the procrastination is avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished. He further states that procrastinate is the process of doing more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones, or carrying out less urgent tasks instead of more urgent ones, thus putting off impending tasks to a later time. However, the procrastination serves as a major problem which contributes to poor reading and inability of the students to read and understanding in post –primary education in Nigeria today.

Moreover, it affects the reading culture among the students only few students are reading and perform well , even this contributes the eagerness of the students who involve in examinations malpractices both internal and external examinations. For instance, in 2014 and 2015 (WAEC) cancelled the results of more than four zones in Nigeria (South- West, South- South ,

South East and North) of senior secondary school certificate examination), while in other zones many students could not pass English language and Mathematics (Adekunle 2004). Dilmac, (2009) states that the Procrastination appears to be a troubling phenomenon, people most strongly characterized it as being bad, harmful, and foolish. Justifying this viewpoint, several studies have linked it to individual performance, with the procrastinator performing more poorly overall, and to individual well-being, with the procrastinator being more miserable in the long term.

### **Components of Procrastination**

At larger levels of analysis, Procrastination has been linked to several organizational and societal issues. George (2005) considers procrastination as a dispositional trait which has cognitive, behavioral and emotional components, furthermore it affects activities of students who could not read but only postponing time of reading. Allien and Milgram (2017) proposes that procrastination is primarily:

- (1) A behavior sequence of postponement;
- (2) Resulting in a substandard behavioral product;
- (3) Involving a task that is perceived by the procrastinator as being important to perform; and
- (4) Resulting in a state of emotional upset.

Langton (2016) defines procrastination as avoidance of the implementation of an intention, frustrates an individual's stated purposes by simply putting it off until it's too late or nearly too late. The high threshold for certainty needed before acting on a choice leads to taking longer to complete the task and to seeking more information about alternatives. Kims (2015) distinguishes between the optimistic procrastinator and the pessimistic procrastinator.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Social learning theory***

Albert Bandura (1977) is considered as the father of then social learning theory. Fellow social researchers support his view that individuals learn new behaviours by observing and imitating modelled attitudes, emotions and behaviours towards the environment. Naturally, children tend to copy good and bad behaviours from adults and other children. Those at risk of antisocial conduct learn from others that socially unaccepted behaviour is right. Some scholars concur and contend that vulnerable youth learn anti-social behaviour through the attitudes and behaviours of their peers (Haynie 2001). They may, for example steal, lie, fight, disrespect others, bully, cheat in tests, and commit serious offences such as rape and murder, individually or in groups. Shannon and McCall (n.d.) concur, and add that adolescents tend to condone anti-social behaviour because they copy their peers and others. Social learning theory focuses on the social context as a site for learning behaviour and the reciprocal influence between the individual, the behaviour and the environment. Jekielek (1998) concurs and cites the example of children who observe and learn their parent's aggressive behaviour towards each other, and apply it to solve their own problems. They learn that it is okay to swear, bully, use vulgar language, threaten and assault others in conflict situations. Thus, any inappropriate behaviour by adults, irrespective of the context, plus children at risk of misconduct.

#### ***Social Control Theory***

This theory was propounded by Hirsch (1969) and the theory suggests that a person's ties or bonds to social institutions such as family, church, school etc prevent him/her from pursuing better time management (Curran and Renzetti, 1994). The theory is based on the concept that time management become relevant in communication because it is the easiest, most

efficient, most gratifying way to interact with theirs. Therefore, if children are relatively unattached to elements of their surrounding social institutions, they are more likely to develop better time management. According to Hirsch, variations in behaviour among children could be explained by variations in attachment to others, commitment to conventional goals, acceptance of conventional moral standards or belief, and involvement in conventional activities. These four were considered to be dimensions of the social bond, and the greater the bonds between a child and society, the lower the odds of involvement in delinquency. When social bonds to conventional role models, values and institutions such as family, school, church etc are aggregated for the child in a particular setting, they measure much the same phenomena as captured by concepts such as network ties or social integration indeed in comparison with theoretical traditions. Macionis (2005:199) noted that, children who feel time management are not important phenomena in their life end up becoming failure in school. Hirschi linked conformity to societal rules to four different types of social control:

1. Attachment: The family environment is the source of attachment because parents acts as role models and teach their children the socially accepted behaviours. Strong attachments encourage conformity; weak attachment/relationships, especially in the family and in school leave child freer to engage in delinquent acts.
2. Opportunity: The greater people access legitimate opportunity, the greater the advantages of conformity. By contrast, children with little confidence in future success are more likely to drift towards deviance.
3. Involvement: Extensive involvement/participation in conventional activities which lead towards socially

valued success and status objectives, such as going to school, and playing sports inhibits deviance. By contrast, juveniles without these activities, those who simply “hang out” waiting for something to happen have time and energy for social activity (Langbein and Roseanna, 2002).

4. Belief: This is the acceptance to the moral validity of the central social-value system. Strong belief in conventional morality and respect for authority figures restrain tendencies towards delinquency. In other words, children who have weak conscience and who are left unsupervised are more vulnerable to temptation (Osgood et al., 1996).

Hirschi social control theory rest on the Hobbesian assumption that “human behaviour is not inherently conforming, but that we are all animals and thus naturally capable of having better social skill. In conclusion, a person’s relative social privilege and strength of moral character gives that individual a stake in conforming to conventional norms (Sampson and Laub, 1990).

#### ***The Social Models Theory of Fiske***

The social models theory of Fiske (Fiske, 1991; Fiske, 1992) claims that people are fundamentally sociable. They generally organize their social life in terms of their relations with other people. In general people seek to create, sustain, and repair social relationships because the relationships themselves are subjectively imperative, intrinsically satisfying, and significant. The social models theory integrates the work of the major social theorists and builds on a synthesis of empirical studies across the social sciences, including anthropological fieldwork. From an exhaustive review of the major thinking on time management Fiske argues for the existence of two fundamental forms of human time management: communal sharing and

understanding of the child. The two social structures are manifestations of elementary mental models (schemata). Fiske's assertion about the pervasiveness and importance of these two forms of human relationships is not a modest one. He hypothesizes that the two models are 'fundamental, in the sense that they are the lowest or most basic-level "grammar" for social skill. Further, the models are general, giving order to most forms of time management, thought, and affect. They are elementary, in the sense that they are the basic constituents for all higher order social forms. They are universal, being the basis for social relations among people in all cultures and the essential foundation for cross-cultural understanding and intercultural engagement ((Fiske, 1991) p.25)'. Table 1 summarizes some of the major postulations of the relation models theory. Each of the relational models is now briefly described. Communal social relationships (CS) are based on a conception of some bounded group of people as equivalent and undifferentiated. In this kind of social relationship, the members of a group or dyad treat each other as all the same, focusing on commonalities and disregarding distinct individual identities, this will help the child develop better time management. People in a children in communal social relationship often think of themselves as sharing some common substance (e.g., family ties), and hence think that it is natural to be relatively kind and altruistic to people of their own kind. Close kinship ties usually involve a major communal social component, as does intense love; ethical and national identities and even minimal groups are more attenuated forms of communal social. When children are thinking in terms of equivalence relations, they tend to regard the equivalence class to which they themselves belong as better than others, and to favor it. Authority ranking relationships (AR) are based on a model of asymmetry among people who are linearly

ordered along some hierarchical social dimension. People higher in rank have prestige, prerogatives, and privileges that their inferiors lack, but subordinates are often entitled to protection and pastoral care. Authorities often control some aspects of their subordinates' actions. Relationships between people of different ranks in the military are predominantly governed by this model, as are relations across generations and between genders in many traditional societies. Although, in principle, in any society or situation, people could be ranked in different hierarchies according to innumerable different status-relevant features, in practice, people tend to reduce these factors to a single linear ordering. When children are thinking in terms of such linearly ordered structures they tend to develop a better social skill.

### **Optimistic procrastinators**

Optimistic procrastinators put off their intentions but do not worry about it. They are confident that they will succeed in the end, regardless of their engagement in the intended action now or later. Moreover, they overestimate their progress and their chances to succeed and underestimate the time needed to achieve their goal. In contrast, pessimistic procrastinators do worry about their dilatory behaviour. They are aware of the fact that they get behind schedule. Nevertheless, they still procrastinate because they do not know how to deal with the task. They feel incompetent and are afraid that their involvement in the task will prove their incompetence. Therefore, they procrastinate to avoid unpleasant experiences Dewitte and Lens, (2000) state that a major difference between the two types might be their degree of adaptive. Although procrastination in general seems to be related to several psychopathological symptoms, this link might be due primarily to pessimistic procrastinators and much less to optimistic procrastinators, who seem to manage their problems reasonably well. Zim Chu and

Choi (2005) distinguish between two sorts of procrastination behaviors. They stated that Passive procrastinators are paralyzed by their indecision and as a result fail to complete tasks on time. This is certainly an unfavorable behavior. However, active procrastinators prefer to work under pressure and make deliberate decisions to procrastinate tasks, nevertheless, they usually complete their tasks on time. Two types that are particularly common are behavioural- and decisional procrastination.

### **Behavioural Procrastination**

Behavioural procrastination is a self-sabotage strategy that allows people to shift blame and avoid action, for example: a student may do poorly in an exam and use procrastination as an excuse. “Ferrari also thinks that procrastinators suffer from low esteem and self-doubt and worry about how other people judge their abilities. Prolonged procrastination and failure to perform adequately creates a cycle of self-defeating behavior, which results in a downward spiral of self-esteem. Self-inflicted degradation and shame of this kind often translates into stress and (mental) health problems at some point.

### **Decisional Procrastination**

The decisional procrastination strategy is to put off making a decision when dealing with conflicts or choices. People who practice high level decisional procrastination tend to be afraid of errors and are likely to be perfectionists. These procrastinators seek out more and more information about alternatives before attempting to make a decision, if they make one at all. (Dimkisma 2003).

### **Reasons Why Students Procrastinate**

**Forgetting about it:** For whatever reason missing class, being distracted when the teacher announced the homework, not writing it down, or forgetting to look at the class website sometimes

students leave their work until the last minute because they genuinely have no idea that there’s any work to be done. (That is, until a friend mentions it the day beforehand or until they walk into class the next morning.) Technically speaking, this wouldn’t be classified as “procrastination” because the student is not resisting their work they simply don’t realize they have any work! But this is definitely a common cause of leaving things until the last minute.

**Lack of clarity about the desired outcome:** When students are confused by an assignment, or don’t know exactly what is expected of them, they often put off the assignment in hopes that they will understand it better later. This is especially problematic for students who are uncomfortable with uncertainty or unknown situations. Unfortunately, when they look at it the night before the deadline, they usually have no more information than they did before and no time left to ask their teacher for clarification. Optimistic time estimates. Optimism is a wonderful quality in most situations. But when it comes to estimating how much time it will take to complete an assignment, optimistic time estimates can create big problems. Students commonly overestimate the amount of time they have left to complete assignments, and underestimate the amount of time it will take to complete them. Consequently, they fail to leave themselves enough time to complete the work.

**Girl staying up late working on overdue assignment Overly-lenient deadlines:** When teachers don’t enforce deadlines and allow students to turn in late work without a penalty, students learn that deadlines aren’t meaningful and cease to take them seriously. Without meaningful consequences, external deadlines can start to feel as arbitrary as internal deadlines, which while helpful are not as effective at discouraging procrastination. Not knowing where to start. When students think of papers or projects as a whole, rather than as a series of steps, they

can seem overwhelming and they don't know where to begin. So, they end up putting the whole project off, until it's so close to the deadline that their worry about not knowing the "right" place to start is overshadowed by their fear of not having enough time to complete the work at all.

Poor study routines. Students' after-school routines tend to be fairly habitual. Once they are established, these behavior patterns are followed automatically, with very little conscious thought. For example, students sometimes will start watching TV as a break after school, which automatically leads to procrastination because it's hard to turn it off. Or, students will have a pattern of leaving their most difficult work, their studying, or their long-term projects until the end of their homework time, when they have the least energy and the smallest amount of willpower. These habits can cause students to procrastinate automatically, without even thinking about it.

**Distractions:** Sometimes students set aside time with the intention of completing their work, but end up distracted with other things. These distractions can be external (Face book, text messages, etc.) or internal (their own thoughts & impulses). Either way, this results in them spending time that had been budgeted for their work in other ways. Overwhelm. When an assignment seems very complex or time-consuming, even thinking about it can seem scary and stressful. So, students often fall into the trap of putting it off. Unfortunately, this ultimately backfires when they eventually do start the project because now the inherent difficulty of the project is compounded by the fact that they have insufficient time to complete it. So, they end up with far more stress than they would have had if they had started earlier.

**Perfectionism /Fear of failure:** Students preoccupied with making their projects "perfect", nervous about making mistakes or "messing them up", or afraid of criticism, are often so concerned about doing assignments incorrectly that they will

put them off to avoid the anxiety they feel when they are trying to work on the project. This can lead to the seemingly irrational behavior of avoiding the project even more as the deadline approaches (because they become less and less likely to be able to do a good job on it) until, at last, they are so close to the deadline that producing an ideal assignment is no longer possible, and their only options are to do an imperfect job or turn in nothing at all. Difficulty regulating emotions. Recent studies have suggested that procrastination is less of a problem with time management than we had once believed, and more of a difficulty with emotional regulation. Students who feel bored, tired, frustrated or nervous when they work on assignments will often pursue a strategy of trying to make themselves feel better in the short-term by downplaying the assignment ("it's no big deal; it won't affect my grade much anyway") and distracting themselves with fun, rewarding activities in order to improve their mood.

**Too many commitments:** If a student has so many scheduled activities and so little free time that their life feels like an endless string of obligations and chores, with little or no time off, they may use procrastination as a method to artificially create "free time" for themselves. Unfortunately, this type of "free time" is usually not very satisfying because it's also accompanied with a sense of guilt for avoiding the things they "should" be working on.

**Resistance:** Students will sometimes procrastinate as a form of rebellion when they view work as something that is being "forced" on them by an unreasonable teacher or authoritarian parents. Procrastination becomes their way of resisting this authority. When students think of assignments as something they "have to" do, schoolwork becomes a chore rather than a choice and they are more tempted to procrastinate on it. Procrastination can then become their way of resisting the message that they are "supposed to"

complete their work by showing teachers and parents “you can’t make me do it”. Girl asleep staying up late to work on homework .The solutions to use with students are different for each of these scenarios which is why it is so important to identify the root cause for a student’s procrastination before giving them tips or advice about how to fix it. For example, reminders about the consequences of an impending deadline may help a teen who hasn’t been taking deadlines seriously but, for a student with a fear of failure or difficulty regulating emotions, it could actually make things worse by increasing their anxiety about the assignment and their desire to do something else in order to avoid these negative emotions

### **Social Support and Procrastination**

Karen (2016) investigated the relationship between social support and negative procrastination and their simultaneous effect on psychological well-being. A review of 28 studies revealed that there are conceptual, theoretical, and methodological limitations associated with this body of research. In order to unravel some of these limitations, studies are grouped according to three conceptual models: the additive effects model, the moderator model, and the domain-specific model. Finally, the article discusses directions social work practice research should take to tackle and fully appreciate the complexities of the relationship between social support and psychological well-being. David (2018) investigate the impact of social activities, social networks and social support on the cognitive functioning of healthy older adults (50+) and examine the differential effects of aspects of social relationships on various cognitive domains. We followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) guidelines, and collated data from randomized controlled trials (RCTs), genetic and observational studies.

Independent variables of interest included subjective measures of social activities, social networks, and social support, and composite measures of social relationships (CMSR). The primary outcome of interest was cognitive function divided into domains of episodic memory, semantic memory, overall memory ability, working memory, verbal fluency, and reasoning, attention, processing speed, visuospatial abilities, overall executive functioning and global cognition. Thirty-nine studies were included in the review; three RCTs, 34 observational studies, and two genetic studies. Evidence suggests a relationship between (1) social activity and global cognition and overall executive functioning, working memory, visuospatial abilities and processing speed but not episodic memory, verbal fluency, reasoning or attention; (2) social networks and global cognition but not episodic memory, attention or processing speed; (3) social support and global cognition and episodic memory but not attention or processing speed; and (4) CMSR and episodic memory and verbal fluency but not global cognition. The results support prior conclusions that there is an association between social relationships and cognitive function but the exact nature of this association remains unclear. Implications of the findings are discussed and suggestions for future research provided.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Heinz (2016) found out the influence of socio economic status on social, emotional and behaviour problem, for which the survey method has been adapted. Random sampling technique has been used for the present study for the selection of sample. The sample of the study includes the adolescent students studying in Adi-Dravidar Welfare School in Cuddalore District of Tamilnadu, India. The social, emotional and behaviour problem scale standardized by R. Gnanadevan et al. (2015) and socio economic

status tool standardized by Kuppuswamy (1913) have been used for collecting data from the sample. The present study indicates that the socio economic status significantly contributed to the social, emotional and behaviour problem of students. 29.2% of the total variance in socio-economic status is attributed by the social, emotional and behaviour problem of students studying in Adi-dravidar welfare schools. Proper efforts can be made for the desired care, treatment and progress of the children with social, emotional and behaviour problems through collaborated approach involving effective behavioural and educational intervention. The study has shown that social support and motivation have different relationship with procrastination of year one students in University of Port Harcourt. This study has empirically shown that social support and motivation as relates with procrastination of year one students in University of Port Harcourt.

### Recommendations

1. Parents and government should try and provide social support to the students, this will help to reduce procrastination among students.
2. Parents should as well get attached well with their children as this will help them adjust better in school.
3. School administrators should try and introduce programmes that will help improve the social integration of this students and this will as well help reduce procrastination.

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