

Procrastination among the Undergraduates in a Nigerian University: Implications for Time Management

A.I. Ajayi and P.M. Osiki

Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education,
University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract: The study investigated the reasons for procrastination and its effects among the undergraduates in a Nigerian University. A sample of 250 subjects who were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques, was used in the study. An instrument tagged “Questionnaire on Procrastination among Undergraduates (QPU) was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentage scores. The study revealed that the undergraduates procrastinated in various ways and the degree of procrastination among them was high. Moreover, it was found that the reasons for procrastination among the undergraduates include laziness and sluggishness, fear of making mistakes; fear of not performing well and lack of decision and determination and leniency of the lecturers. The effects of procrastination among the undergraduates include poor academic performance, anxiety, failure to meet deadlines and hindrance of achievement in life endeavour. In order to solve the problems of procrastination, it was recommended that the undergraduates should engage in effective time management through proper time planning and avoidance of time wasters and procrastinators.

Key words: Time management, implication, procrastination, undergraduate, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The word procrastination comes from a Latin verb "procrastinare" which means, "to defer until morning". It appears many scholars from around the world are finding that procrastination is more complex and persuasive than armchair analysts might assume and helping people come out of their pits of postponement is not simple as giving them a tip of water. Procrastination is when one keeps re-organising once schedule so that little or nothing is get done, whereas choosing to do one task while temporary putting another on hold is simply setting priorities, which allow people to cross-things off their to-do lists one at a time. According to Ajayi (2007), procrastination is the avoidance or postponement of a task which needs to be accomplished. Tomorrow is a fiction of a day, which is never stable. At the dawn of each day, tomorrow is shifted to the next day. The shift continues day-by-day pushing tomorrow forward by a day. Tomorrow therefore, may not be trusted absolutely. A duty delayed till tomorrow may not be done at the right time.

Procrastination is one of the problems which militate against effective learning by the students and their academic performance. According to Ferrari (1995), the various ways through which students procrastinate

include difficulty in meeting schedules, submitting assignment late, delaying writing of notes, delaying tasks till assume convenient time, being reluctant in performing tasks and waiting for dying minutes to accomplish a task.

Procrastination appears to be a serious problem among undergraduate students. Some undergraduate students are fond of postponing the works they are to do. They look for convenient time to do their assignments; some of them always feel reluctant in performing tasks that ought to be done urgently while some of them always wait for the last minutes to study for examinations. The attitude sometimes develops to become a habit, which affects their entire life. Since, failure to prepare is preparing to fail, the seed sown by procrastination and nurtured by habitual postponement of things to do may produce sour fruits of woeful performance.

The undergraduates may procrastinate for various reasons. While some of them do so because of the feeling that there is still time to do what ought to be done immediately and some procrastinate as a result of laziness. Other reasons for procrastination may include fear of not performing well, fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confidence. Experience has also shown that some undergraduates procrastinate because some of their lecturers are either too lenient or often accept excuses of students for not doing their assignments.

The extent of procrastination among the undergraduates appears to vary. It is not unlikely that some of them who are lazy procrastinate more than those who are hardworking. In one study by Ferrari (1995), it was found that students at higher selective colleges reported higher rates of academic procrastination than students from less selective institution. His study also showed that the motives for academic procrastination among students at an elite college differed from students' motives at a nonselective one (the former put off assignment because they found them unpleasant, while the later did so because they feared failure of social disapproval). Ferrari (1995) further identified two kinds of habitual procrastinators-Arousal procrastinators and Avoidant procrastinators. "Arousal procrastinators" believe they work best under pressure and tend to delay tasks for the thrill. "Avoidant procrastinators" are self-doubters who tend to postpone tasks because they worry about performing inadequately, or because they fear their success may raise others expectations of them.

In another study, Eric (2005) suggested that people who are typically negative avoid assignments that do not change them creatively or intellectually, whereas people who are typically positive more easily tackle less-stimulating tasks. Science, according Ferrari (1995) is not likely to resolve the mysteries of procrastination soon, because there are still ranges of debate among researchers about the definition of procrastination. Eric (2005) qualifies his optimism by saying one cannot hope to cure procrastination so much as to reduce it. It is very hard to go from being a hard-core procrastinator to a non-procrastinator. A student who has good reasons to justify his procrastination attitudes is invariably piling up reasons to justify his failure in life. There cannot be logical reasons why assignments and tasks should be postponed.

Kumuyi (2005) identified time killers as habits, practices, things or perhaps people that fill ones time with activity but rob one of real achievement. These may be laziness, too much sleep, procrastination, endless TV viewing, insatiable appetite for internet browsing and compulsive text messaging on the mobile phone. It is vivid therefore that procrastination is a habit. Procrastinators give a lot of excuses, which they claim do not allow them to take actions at appropriate time. Some procrastinators are busy here and there doing nothing and leaving something else important undone. The busy schedule of procrastinators makes them to shift duties of today till tomorrow. Sometimes, delayed works are never done and if actions are eventually taken on such tasks, it is usually too late. One may then think about many great opportunities that might have been lost due to procrastination.

Procrastination hinders efficient utilisation of time in the task of accomplishing both individual and corporate goals. It is an avoidable evil with grave consequences. Kumuyi (2005) enumerated the peril of procrastination. He described procrastination as a terrible "time-waster" and duty "delayer". Procrastination and postponement are also described as twin-destroyers. He further observed that, "procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried". He submitted that it is very dangerous to engage in a game of ease and convenience.

An adage says, "Time and tides wait for no one". Another adage says, "Punctuality is the soul of business".. Time is very precious and it means different things to different people. To a businessman it means money. To a civil servant it means his promotion. To the soldier time is safety and victory. To the preacher it means the salvation of the never dying souls. To the students, time is success and certificate. Therefore, diligence demands that one must be prompt and punctual in all one does. One has a duty of managing ones time properly to prepare adequately ones work for any eventuality. Many people wait for the best time before beginning to do something, this often leads to postponement of what ought to have been done now till the so called "best time". The negative effects of procrastination call for time management.

Time management is the effective and efficient utilisation of ones time to achieve personal or corporate goals. According to Obi (2001), time management involves identifying tasks to be performed, planning and scheduling organizational activities, prioritizing such activities, allocating time to the tasks according to their degree of importance in enhancing productivity, minimizing interruptions and frivolities and then declining with routine tasks in such a way that truly important task could be given due attention. Learning effective time management is the first step toward becoming an effective student. In order to achieve effective time management, it is necessary to write down your schedule, to plan ahead and to work with a realistic schedule (Nellie, 2003).

Our attitude toward achieving any given task matters a lot, if you number English alphabets from A to Z, the corresponding numbers to the words in attitude are: A = 1; T = 20; T = 20; I = 9; T = 20; U = 21, D = 4; E = 5. When the figures are sum up the number result will get a hundred. The result describes the achiever's attitude which involves full concentration, total commitment and complete compliance to proven principles of success pursuit. Achievers attitude is hundred percent positive to the accomplishment of any given task. A time manager lifestyle therefore portrays high-level optimistic attitude to success. He is punctual and regular in school and

in class works. He writes his notes, does his home work and follow his personal timetable to manage his time judiciously.

Identifying and mitigating potential time wasters eliminates wastage in the organisation. Some of these time wasters as identified by the Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development (1993) include: “lack of planning; lack of priorities; over-commitment; meetings; indecision; unclear objectives; postponed decision; procrastination; lack of delegation; lack of self discipline; unnecessary meetings; inconsistent actions; socialising and interrupting others.

The basic strategy for sound time management as found in Otebelu’s (2001) constitutes 3 keys “remembering, setting priorities and motivation”. This assists the individual to avoid the time wasters’ myth that there is always time for any activity. Time wasters, once identified should be eliminated. “This involves budgeting time and developing efficient work habits (Otubelu, 2001). Ajayi (2007) also identified strategies for time management in the school system as setting priorities, time scheduling, avoiding or reducing time wasters, avoiding procrastination, delegation, time saving and avoiding being a workaholic.

The treatment of procrastination begins with student recognizing the underlying causes of procrastination, which is self-handicapped and inability to managing time at ones disposal (Eric, 2005). Each student must be rational in the use of his or her time. Instructors also can assist students by using weekly quizzes to cut procrastination time from week to days and limit last minute cramming in order to reduce study-related stress. Rewarding students who are prompt in submitting tasks given can also be a way of reducing the rate of procrastination in the academic setting.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to find out the various ways through which undergraduate students procrastinate, the degree of their procrastination and the reasons why they procrastinate. The study would also find out the effects of procrastination on the undergraduates and make recommendations based on the findings.

Research questions: Based on the purpose of the study, the following questions are raised:

- What are the various ways through which undergraduates procrastinate?
- What is the percentage degree of procrastination among the undergraduates?
- What are the reasons for procrastination among the undergraduates?
- What are the effects of procrastination among the undergraduates?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The descriptive research of the survey type was adopted in the study. The population of the study consisted of all undergraduate students at the University of Ado-Ekiti who were on full time programmes. As at the time of the study there were 8412 undergraduates in the University, excluding the new intakes.

The sample of the study was made up of 250 undergraduate students who were selected from eight faculties using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A self designed instrument tagged “Questionnaire on Procrastination among Undergraduates (QPU) was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A sought information on personal bio-data of the respondents while Section B sought information on the ways, causes and effects of procrastination among the students. The instrument was validated by experts and had a reliability coefficient of 0.8631. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency count and percentage scores.

RESULTS

Research question 1: what are the various ways through which undergraduates procrastinate?: Table 1 shows the various ways through which students procrastinate. Item 1 reveals that 185 (74%) of the respondents agreed that students find it difficult to follow their work schedules, while 65 (26%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. On item 2, 145 (58%) of the respondents agreed

Table 1: Various ways through which the undergraduates procrastinate

S/N	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	I find it difficult to follow my work schedules	185	74	65	26
2.	I am fond of delaying my assignment or reading till a more convenient time	175	70	75	30
3.	I often submit my assignment at the dying minutes	145	58	105	42
4.	I always feel reluctant in performing tasks that ought to be done urgently	155	62	95	38
5.	I always wait for last minutes to study for examinations	160	64	90	36

that students are fond of delaying their assignment till a more convenient time, but 105 (42%) of the respondents were of a contrary view. Item 3 shows that 175 (70%) of the respondents agreed that students often submit their assignment at the dying minutes. In addition, item 4 shows that 155 (62%) of the respondents agreed that students always feel reluctant in performing tasks that ought to be done urgently, while 95 (38%) of the respondents expressed a different view. Finally, item 5 shows that 160 (64%) of the respondents agreed that students always wait for last minutes to study for examination, while 90 (36%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

Research questions 2: what is the percentage degree of procrastination among the undergraduates?: As shown in Table 2, 75 (30%) of the respondents engaged in low degree of procrastination, while 150 (60%) of them had high degree of procrastination. Only 25 (10%) of them had chronic degree of procrastination. It thus shows that the degree of procrastination among the undergraduates was high.

Research question 3: what are the reasons for procrastination among the undergraduate?: Table 3 shows the reasons for procrastination among the undergraduate. On item 9, 210 (84%) of the respondents agreed that students procrastinate because they feel there is still more time, while 40 (16%) disagreed. On item 10, 160 (64%) of the respondents agreed that students

procrastinate due to laziness and sluggishness, while 90 (36%) disagreed. As shown in item 11, 125 (50%) of the respondents agreed that students postpone task because they want to see others do it first and 125 (50%) disagreed with the item. Also, 150 (60%) of the respondents agreed on item 12 that students procrastinate due to fear of making mistakes, while 100 (40%) disagreed. On item 13, 170 (68%) of the respondents agreed that students procrastinate because it has become a habit, while 80 (32%) disagreed. In addition, 160 (64%) of the respondents agreed on item 14 that students postpone task so as to gain more knowledge and experience, while 90 (36%) disagreed. As shown in item 15, 150 (60%) of the respondents agreed that leniency of a lecturer makes students to procrastinate, while 100 (40%) disagreed. It is seen also that 185 (74%) of the respondents agreed on item 16 that fear of not performing well lead to procrastination, while 65 (26%) disagreed. As shown on item 17, 145 (58%) of the respondents agreed that lack of self-confidence could result in student's procrastination, while 105 (42%) disagreed. Furthermore, 175 (70%) of the respondents agreed on item 18 that students often

Table 2: Percentage degree of procrastination among university undergraduates students

S/N	Degree	f	(%)
6.	Low (0-59%)	75	30
7.	High (60-79%)	150	60
8.	Chronic (80-100%)	25	10
	Total	250	100

Table 3: Reasons on procrastination among the undergraduates

S/N	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		f	(%)	f	(%)
9.	Students procrastinate because they feel there is still time to do what ought to be done now	210	84	40	16
10.	Procrastination is due to laziness and sluggishness	160	64	90	36
11.	Students postpone a task because they want to see another person do it first	125	50	125	50
12.	Students procrastinate due to fear of making mistakes	150	60	100	40
13.	Students procrastinate because it has become a habit	170	68	80	32
14.	Students sometimes postpone task so as to gain more knowledge and experience	160	64	90	36
15.	Leniency of the lecturers makes students to procrastinate	150	60	100	40
16.	Fear of not performing well lead to procrastination among students	185	74	65	26
17.	Lack of self confidence can result in students procrastination	145	58	105	42
18.	Students often procrastinate due to lack of decision and determination	175	70	75	30
19.	Students procrastinate because of fear of social disapproval	175	70	75	30

Table 4: Effects of procrastination among the undergraduate students

S/N	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		f	(%)	f	(%)
20.	Procrastination is a time-killer among undergraduates	150	60	100	40
21.	Procrastination can promote poor performance among undergraduates	185	74	65	26
22.	Procrastination produces anxiety and affect ones nervous system.	155	62	95	38
23.	Postponement of tasks can hinder achievement in life endeavour.	190	76	60	24
24.	Deadlines are often not met due to postponement of tasks.	160	64	90	36
25.	Great opportunities are lost due of procrastination.	175	70	75	30
26.	Delay task is a delayed success.	150	60	100	40

procrastinate due to lack of decision and determination, while 75(30%) disagreed. Finally, on item 19, 175 (70%) of the respondents agreed that students procrastinate because of fear of social disapproval, while 75 (30%) disagreed.

Research question 4: what are the effects of procrastination among the undergraduates?: Table 4 shows the effects of procrastination among the undergraduates. Item 20 shows that 150 (60%) of the respondents agreed that procrastination is a time-killer, while 100 (40%) of them disagreed. In item 21, it is seen that 185 (74%) of the respondents agreed that procrastination promote poor academic performance, on the other hand, 65 (26%) of them disagreed. Also item 22 reveals that 155 (62%) of the respondents agreed that procrastination produces anxiety and affect ones nervous system, while 98 (38%) of the disagreed. On item 23, 190 (76%) of respondents agreed that postponement of tasks could hinder achievement in life endeavour, while 60 (24%) of them disagreed. On item 24, 160 (74%) of the respondents agreed that deadlines are often not met due to postponement of tasks, but 90 (36%) of the respondents disagreed. Moreover, item 25 shows that 175 (70%) of the respondents agreed that great opportunities are lost due to procrastination, while 75 (30%) of them disagreed. On item 26, 150 (60%) of respondents agreed that a delayed task is a delayed success, while 100 (40%) of them disagreed.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the undergraduates procrastinated in various ways. These include difficulty in following their schedules, delaying in execution and submission of assignments, reluctance in performing tasks that ought to be done urgently and waiting for last minutes to study for examinations. It must be emphasized that these various acts of procrastination among the students may not guarantee effective learning and good academic performance. When students develop the habit of procrastination, they may not be able to live up to expectation in their studies. Therefore in an attempt to fill in the gap, some of them may engage in examination malpractice. When such students are not caught in such an ugly act, the credibility of the degrees being awarded to them at the end of their academic programmes becomes questionable.

It was also found out that the degree of procrastination among the undergraduates was high. This portends a danger for the quality of graduates being

produced in the university. High level of procrastination among the students is inimical to the required study habit for sound university education. It is not unlikely that students who engage in high level of procrastination will develop poor study habit which may result in production of half baked graduates.

The study also revealed that the undergraduates procrastinate for various reasons. These include the feeling that there is still time to do what to be done now; laziness and sluggishness; fear of making mistakes; habit; the desire to gain more knowledge and experience; leniency of the lecturers; the fear of not performing well; lack of decision and determination and fear of social disapproval. It must be stressed that the students have no good reasons to procrastinate in their studies otherwise they have to own up for their failure in academic pursuit which is likely to be caused by the various acts of procrastination. The finding is in support of the view shared by Eric (2005) who affirmed that student who has good reasons to justify his/her procrastination attitudes is invariably pilling up reasons to justify his/her failure in life. The finding is also in line with some of the causes of procrastination identified by Ajayi (2007).

As revealed in the study, the effects of procrastination among the undergraduates include poor academic performance; time killing; anxiety; hindrance of achievement in life endeavour; failure to meet deadlines; lost of great opportunities and delayed success. These can inhibit the promotion of academic excellence in the university system as they may slow down the pace of moral and academic development of the students. The finding further confirms some of the evils of procrastination enumerated by Kumuyi (2005).

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have implications for time management among the undergraduates. The various ways through which the undergraduate procrastinates call for effective management of their time. This can be done through the preparation of realistic schedules and keeping to them, prompt execution and submission of assignments, avoidance of working under pressure and persistent study for examinations.

Furthermore, the undergraduates should use various methods of time management in order to reduce their high level of procrastination. Such methods include defining objectives before activities; detecting and avoiding time wasters; determining to focus on major priorities; developing the habit of do it now rather than postponing every task that needs urgent attention and avoiding being workaholic.

Moreover, effective time management by the undergraduates demands the avoidance of the procrastinators such as the feeling that there is still more time to do what is to be done now; laziness and sluggishness; fear of making mistakes; fear of social disapproval; lack of decision and determination; abuse of lecturer's leniency and fear of not performing well. These will mitigate the negative effects of procrastination among the undergraduates.

CONCLUSION

The rate of procrastination among the undergraduates was high. This could impede the promotion of academic excellence in the university. It therefore becomes necessary for the undergraduates to evolve effective management of their time through proper time scheduling, avoidance of procrastination and reduction of time wasters.

REFERENCES

- Ajayi, I.A., 2007. *Issues in School Management*. Ikeja, Lagos: Bolabay Publications.
- Eric, H., 2005. *New Insights into Chronic Dawdling*; In Tuckman Bruce W. *Treating the Problem of Procrastination*. The Chronicle of Higher Education., Vol. LII, No 16.
- Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development, 1993. *Better Schools Management: Head Teacher Education and Resource Materials*.
- Ferrari, J.R., 1995. *Procrastination and Time Avoidance. Theory, Research and Treatment*. USA: Plenum Publications.
- Kumuyi, W.F., 2005. *Perils of Procrastination: Higher Every Day*. April-June Edn. Abuja: Life Press Publications.
- Nellie, P., 2003. *Learning Skills Counsellor/Educator, for the Counselling and Learning Skills Service*: Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Obi, E., 2001. *Educational Planning in Contemporary Nigeria*. Enugu: Computer Edge Publishers.
- Otebelu, O., 2001. *Time Management: Hints for Effective Performance of School Principals*. A paper presented at a seminar/workshop for Principals of Secondary Schools in Delta State: Asaba and Effurun, pp: 1-9.