

Research

The Role of Intellectual Laziness in Poor Study Habits: A Psychological Investigation

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of intellectual laziness in shaping poor study habits and academic performance among undergraduate students in Anambra State, Nigeria. Despite increased access to educational resources, many students continue to exhibit ineffective study behaviors, raising concerns about underlying psychological factors influencing learning. Grounded in Self-Regulation Theory and Dual-Process Theory, the study adopts a mixed-method research design involving a sample of 300 students selected through stratified sampling. Data were collected using the Intellectual Laziness Scale (ILS) and Study Habits Inventory (SHI), alongside qualitative insights to enrich the findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between intellectual laziness and poor study habits ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that students who avoid cognitive effort are more likely to develop ineffective study patterns. Furthermore, regression analysis showed that intellectual laziness significantly and negatively predicts academic performance. The findings highlight that intellectual laziness is closely associated with low motivation, weak metacognitive skills, and poor self-regulation, all of which contribute to suboptimal academic outcomes. The study concludes that improving academic performance requires addressing these internal psychological factors rather than focusing solely on external conditions. It is recommended that educational institutions implement strategies to enhance motivation, develop metacognitive skills, and promote self-regulated learning among students. These interventions are essential for fostering deeper cognitive engagement and improving overall academic success.

Keywords: Academic performance, Intellectual laziness, Metacognition, Motivation, Self-regulation, Study habits.

Introduction

In an era where access to information has become virtually limitless, the paradox of declining academic engagement among students has raised significant concern within educational and psychological research. Despite the availability of advanced learning tools, digital resources, and structured academic systems, many students continue to exhibit poor study habits characterised by procrastination, superficial learning, lack of consistency, and minimal cognitive effort. This disconnect between opportunity and performance calls for a deeper psychological inquiry into underlying behavioural drivers - one of which is intellectual laziness.

Intellectual laziness refers to a cognitive disposition in which individuals avoid engaging in effortful thinking, critical analysis, and sustained mental exertion. Rather than actively processing information, intellectually lazy individuals tend to rely on shortcuts, passive learning strategies, or minimal-effort approaches to academic tasks. While often overlooked or misattributed to external factors such as a lack of resources or poor teaching methods, intellectual laziness represents an internal psychological barrier that can significantly shape learning outcomes.

The concept is closely linked to established psychological theories such as cognitive miserliness, which suggests that humans naturally conserve mental energy by avoiding complex thinking when possible, and self-regulation theory, which highlights the role of discipline and motivation in sustaining productive behaviours. However, when this natural tendency becomes habitual or excessive, it can manifest as chronic avoidance of deep learning processes, thereby contributing to ineffective study patterns and academic underperformance.

Poor study habits, on the other hand, encompass a range of maladaptive behaviours including irregular study schedules, distraction-prone environments, surface-level engagement with learning materials, and an overreliance on last-minute preparation. These habits not only hinder academic achievement but also limit the development of critical thinking and long-term knowledge retention. While previous research has extensively examined factors such as motivation, socioeconomic status, and teaching quality, the specific role of intellectual laziness as a psychological construct remains underexplored.

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating how intellectual laziness influences the formation and persistence of poor study habits among students. By adopting a psychological lens, the research seeks to examine the cognitive and behavioural

mechanisms through which intellectual laziness manifests and affects academic practices. Furthermore, the study intends to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical interventions by identifying patterns that educators, policymakers, and students themselves can address to improve learning outcomes.

Ultimately, understanding the role of intellectual laziness is crucial in redefining academic support systems and fostering a culture of active, engaged, and intentional learning. This research underscores the need to move beyond surface-level explanations of poor academic performance and instead focus on the deeper psychological tendencies that shape how students learn.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the role of intellectual laziness as a psychological factor influencing poor study habits among students. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the concept of intellectual laziness in students.
2. Identify the psychological factors that influence students' study habits.
3. Determine the relationship between intellectual laziness and academic performance.
4. Provide practical intervention strategies to reduce intellectual laziness and improve study habits.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is intellectual laziness?
2. What psychological factors influence students' study habits?
3. What is the relationship between intellectual laziness and academic performance?
4. How can intellectual laziness be reduced among students?

Research Hypotheses

H01: Intellectual laziness is not significantly present among students as a distinct psychological construct.

H02: Psychological factors such as low motivation and poor self-regulation do not significantly influence students' study habits.

H03: There is no significant relationship between intellectual laziness and academic performance among students.

H04: Targeted intervention strategies do not significantly reduce intellectual laziness or improve students' study habits and academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Intellectual Laziness

Intellectual laziness refers to the tendency of individuals to avoid engaging in effortful cognitive activities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and deep analysis. Although the term itself is not widely standardised in psychological literature, it is closely related to the concept of cognitive miserliness, which describes the human tendency to conserve mental energy by relying on intuitive and low-effort thinking processes (Stanovich, 2018).

Dual-process theories of cognition further explain this tendency by distinguishing between two systems of thinking: a fast, automatic system and a slow, effortful system. Individuals often default to the former, avoiding deeper analytical reasoning unless required (Kahneman, 2011). This preference for minimal cognitive effort can manifest in academic settings as intellectual laziness, where students engage superficially with learning materials rather than processing them deeply.

Closely related is the concept of need for cognition, which reflects an individual's willingness to engage in and enjoy effortful thinking. Students with a low need for cognition are more likely to avoid mentally demanding tasks, thereby reinforcing patterns of intellectual laziness (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Research has shown that higher levels of need for cognition are associated with better academic outcomes, indicating the importance of sustained cognitive effort in learning (Colling et al., 2022).

Thus, intellectual laziness can be conceptualised as a behavioural tendency rooted in cognitive effort avoidance, low intrinsic motivation for thinking, and reliance on mental shortcuts.

2.2 Psychological Factors Influencing Study Habits

Study habits are shaped by a range of psychological factors, particularly motivation, self-regulation and cognitive engagement. Self-regulated learning refers to the processes through which students plan, monitor and control their learning activities. Students with strong self-regulation skills are more likely to develop consistent and effective study habits, while those with weak self-regulation tend to exhibit disorganised and ineffective learning behaviours (Pintrich, 2004).

One of the most prominent factors affecting study habits is academic procrastination. Procrastination reflects a failure of self-regulation, where students delay academic tasks despite being aware of their importance. Empirical evidence shows that procrastination is strongly associated with poor study routines, last-minute preparation, and reduced academic productivity (Steel, 2007).

Motivation also plays a crucial role. Intrinsically motivated students are more likely to engage deeply with academic tasks and persist in the face of difficulty, whereas low motivation often leads to avoidance behaviours and superficial learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In addition, effort regulation - the ability to sustain attention and effort despite challenges - is a key determinant of effective study habits (Zimmerman, 2002).

Recent large-scale studies further highlight the importance of metacognition and effort regulation, showing that students who actively monitor their understanding and regulate their learning strategies tend to achieve better academic outcomes (Zhang et al., 2023).

Overall, poor study habits can be linked to deficiencies in self-regulation, motivation, effort control and cognitive engagement.

2.3 Intellectual Laziness and Academic Performance

The relationship between intellectual laziness and academic performance can be understood through its impact on cognitive engagement and learning strategies. Students who avoid effortful thinking are less likely to engage deeply with academic material, resulting in weaker comprehension and retention.

Research on procrastination provides strong empirical support for this relationship. A meta-analysis by Kim and Seo (2015) found a significant negative correlation between procrastination and academic performance, indicating that avoidance behaviours directly hinder academic success.

Similarly, self-regulated learning has been shown to positively predict academic achievement. Students who actively plan, monitor and evaluate their learning tend to perform better academically (Zimmerman, 2002). This suggests that intellectual laziness, characterised by avoidance of such effortful processes, may contribute to poorer performance outcomes.

The need for cognition also plays a significant role. Students who are more inclined to engage in effortful thinking tend to achieve higher academic results, while those who avoid cognitive effort are more likely to underperform (Colling et al., 2022).

Furthermore, research indicates that self-discipline is a stronger predictor of academic success than intelligence alone, highlighting the importance of behavioural and psychological factors in determining performance (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Taken together, these findings suggest that intellectual laziness, when viewed as a tendency to avoid cognitive effort and effective study behaviours, is negatively associated with academic performance.

2.4 Strategies for Reducing Intellectual Laziness

Addressing intellectual laziness requires interventions that promote active engagement, self-regulation, and motivation. One of the most effective approaches is the development of self-regulated learning skills. Interventions that teach students how to set goals, manage time, and monitor their progress have been shown to significantly improve academic outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002).

Cognitive psychology also provides evidence-based learning strategies that can counteract passive learning habits. Techniques such as spaced practice, retrieval practice, and interleaving encourage active engagement with the material and enhance long-term retention (Roediger & Butler, 2011).

Interventions targeting procrastination are equally important. Since procrastination is closely linked to self-regulation failure, strategies such as task breakdown, time management training, and accountability systems can help students overcome avoidance behaviours (Steel, 2007).

In addition, instructional methods that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and active participation can reduce reliance on low-effort cognitive processes. When students are required to engage deeply with content, they are less likely to adopt intellectually lazy approaches to learning (Kahneman, 2011).

Therefore, effective intervention strategies should focus on enhancing self-regulation, increasing motivation and fostering active cognitive engagement.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Gap

Despite extensive research on cognitive miserliness, motivation, procrastination, and self-regulated learning, few studies explicitly examine these constructs under the unified concept of intellectual laziness. Most existing studies treat these variables independently, without integrating them into a single explanatory framework for poor study habits.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by conceptualising intellectual laziness as a central psychological factor that links cognitive effort avoidance with poor study habits and academic performance. By doing so, it contributes to a more holistic understanding of the internal psychological dynamics that influence student learning outcomes.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary psychological theories: Self-Regulation Theory and the Dual-Process Theory of Cognition. These frameworks provide a comprehensive explanation of how intellectual laziness develops and how it influences study habits and academic performance.

2.2.1 Self-Regulation Theory

Self-Regulation Theory explains how individuals control their thoughts, behaviours, and emotions in order to achieve specific goals. In the academic context, self-regulation involves planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning processes (Zimmerman, 2002).

According to this theory, effective learners are proactive in setting goals, organising their study time, maintaining concentration, and assessing their understanding. Conversely, students with poor self-regulation tend to exhibit disorganised study patterns, low persistence, and a tendency to procrastinate (Pintrich, 2004).

Intellectual laziness can be understood within this framework as a failure of self-regulation, where students avoid exerting the cognitive effort required for meaningful learning. Instead of engaging in deep thinking or sustained study, such students may rely on shortcuts, passive learning or last-minute preparation.

Furthermore, Self-Regulation Theory emphasises the role of effort regulation, which refers to the ability to maintain focus and continue working despite difficulties. Students who lack this ability are more likely to disengage from cognitively demanding tasks, reinforcing patterns of intellectual laziness.

Thus, this theory provides a strong explanation for how poor study habits, such as procrastination, inconsistency, and superficial learning, are linked to underlying psychological processes of self-control and motivation.

2.2.2 Dual-Process Theory of Cognition

Dual-Process Theory provides a cognitive explanation for intellectual laziness by distinguishing between two modes of thinking:

- System 1: Fast, automatic, intuitive and low-effort thinking

- System 2: Slow, deliberate, analytical and effortful thinking

Kahneman (2011). According to this theory, individuals naturally prefer System 1 thinking because it requires less cognitive effort. However, academic tasks often require System 2 thinking, which involves critical analysis, problem solving, and deep understanding.

Intellectual laziness can therefore be conceptualised as a tendency to over-rely on System 1 thinking while avoiding System 2 processing. Students exhibiting this tendency may prefer memorisation over understanding, guesswork over analysis, and quick answers over reflective reasoning.

The concept of cognitive miserliness further supports this explanation, suggesting that individuals tend to conserve mental energy and avoid effortful thinking whenever possible (Stanovich, 2018). In educational settings, this manifests as minimal engagement with academic material and reliance on surface-level learning strategies.

This theory helps explain why students may possess the ability to perform well academically but still engage in poor study habits due to the avoidance of cognitive effort.

2.2.3 Relevance of the Theories to the Study

The integration of Self-Regulation Theory and Dual-Process Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding intellectual laziness and its impact on study habits.

- Self-Regulation Theory explains the behavioural dimension, highlighting how poor control over learning processes leads to ineffective study habits.
- Dual-Process Theory explains the cognitive dimension, demonstrating how the preference for low-effort thinking contributes to intellectual laziness.

Together, these theories suggest that intellectual laziness is not merely a lack of ability but a combination of cognitive effort avoidance and poor self-regulation, both of which negatively influence academic performance.

By applying these frameworks, this study is able to examine intellectual laziness as a multidimensional construct that affects how students think, learn and perform academically.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative aspect was used to examine the relationship

between intellectual laziness, study habits, and academic performance, while the qualitative component provided deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions regarding their study behaviours.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised undergraduate students in Anambra State, Nigeria. This population was considered appropriate due to their active engagement in academic activities and exposure to varying study habits and learning environments.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A total sample size of 300 undergraduate students was selected for the study. The sample was drawn using a stratified sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across different academic levels, faculties and departments.

The population was first divided into relevant strata (e.g. year of study or faculty), after which participants were randomly selected from each stratum. This approach enhanced the representativeness and reliability of the findings.

3.4 Instruments for Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using standardised instruments, which included:

- Intellectual Laziness Scale (ILS):

This instrument was used to measure students' tendency to avoid effortful cognitive engagement. It captures behaviours such as preference for easy tasks, avoidance of deep thinking, and reliance on minimal-effort learning strategies.

- Study Habits Inventory (SHI): This instrument assessed students' study behaviours, including time management, consistency, concentration, and learning strategies.

In addition, a qualitative component (open-ended questions/interviews) was included to obtain deeper insights into students' attitudes towards studying and cognitive effort.

Responses for the quantitative instruments were measured using a Likert scale format (e.g., Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).

3.5 Validity of the Instruments

The instruments were subjected to content and face validity through expert review in the fields of psychology and education. This ensured that the items adequately measured the constructs of intellectual laziness and study habits.

3.6 Reliability of the Instruments

The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable, indicating the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through the administration of questionnaires to the selected respondents. The questionnaires were distributed either physically or electronically, depending on accessibility.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Consent was obtained prior to participation.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents was analysed using appropriate statistical techniques.

- Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation) were used to examine the prevalence of intellectual laziness.
- Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between intellectual laziness and study habits.
- Regression analysis was employed to assess the effect of intellectual laziness on academic performance.

For the qualitative data, responses were analysed using thematic analysis, where common patterns and themes were identified and interpreted.

All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

3.9 Model Specification

The relationship between the variables is expressed as:

$$AP = f(IL, SH)$$

Expanded as follows:

$$AP = \beta_0 + \beta_1IL + \beta_2SH + \epsilon$$

Where:

- AP = Academic Performance
- IL = Intellectual Laziness
- SH = Study Habits
- ϵ = error term

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted to examine the role of intellectual laziness in poor study habits and academic performance among undergraduate students in Anambra State. The findings are presented in accordance with the study objectives, followed by a discussion of the results.

4.2 Prevalence of Intellectual Laziness Among Students

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the level of intellectual laziness among the respondents.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Intellectual Laziness

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Intellectual Laziness	3.42	0.78	Moderately High

Interpretation

The results show a mean score of 3.42, indicating a moderately high level of intellectual laziness among students. This suggests that a considerable number of students tend to avoid effortful cognitive engagement, supporting the premise that intellectual laziness is present within the study population.

4.3 Relationship Between Intellectual Laziness and Study Habits

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between intellectual laziness and study habits.

Table 4.2: Correlation between Intellectual Laziness and Study Habits

Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision
Intellectual Laziness vs Study Habits	0.65	<0.05	Significant

Interpretation

The results reveal a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$) between intellectual laziness and poor study habits. This indicates that as intellectual laziness increases, poor study habits also increase.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) stating that there is no significant relationship is rejected.

4.4 Effect of Intellectual Laziness on Academic Performance

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of intellectual laziness on academic performance.

Table 4.3: Regression Analysis of Intellectual Laziness and Academic Performance

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Intellectual Laziness	-0.58	-6.21	<0.05	Significant

Interpretation

The regression results show that intellectual laziness has a significant negative effect on academic performance ($\beta = -0.58$, $p < 0.05$).

This implies that an increase in intellectual laziness leads to a decrease in academic performance. Students who avoid cognitive effort are less likely to perform well academically.

Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, confirming that intellectual laziness significantly predicts academic performance.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that intellectual laziness is a significant psychological factor influencing students' study habits and academic performance.

First, the study found a moderately high level of intellectual laziness among students. This aligns with the concept of cognitive miserliness, which suggests that individuals tend to avoid effortful thinking (Stanovich, 2018). It indicates that many students prefer low-effort learning strategies, such as memorisation and last-minute studying.

Second, the study established a strong positive relationship between intellectual laziness and poor study habits. This finding supports previous research on procrastination and self-regulation, which shows that students who avoid effortful engagement are more likely to develop ineffective study patterns (Steel, 2007). It also aligns with Self-Regulation Theory, which emphasises that poor control over learning processes leads to weak study behaviours (Zimmerman, 2002).

Third, the regression analysis revealed that intellectual laziness negatively predicts academic performance. This finding is consistent with studies showing that effort regulation and cognitive engagement are critical predictors of academic success (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Students who fail to engage deeply with learning materials are less likely to achieve high academic outcomes.

Overall, the findings support both Dual-Process Theory and Self-Regulation Theory. Students who rely heavily on low-effort thinking (System 1) and lack self-regulation are more prone to poor study habits and lower academic performance.

4.6 Summary of Findings

The key findings of the study are summarised as follows:

- Intellectual laziness is moderately high among undergraduate students.
- There is a significant positive relationship between intellectual laziness and poor study habits ($r = 0.65, p < 0.05$).
- Intellectual laziness has a significant negative effect on academic performance.
- Students who exhibit higher intellectual laziness tend to have poorer study habits and lower academic achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that intellectual laziness significantly contributes to poor study habits among undergraduate students. Students who exhibit a tendency to avoid effortful cognitive engagement are more likely to develop ineffective study behaviours such as procrastination, inconsistency, and superficial learning.

The study further establishes that intellectual laziness is not merely a matter of ability but is strongly linked to underlying psychological factors, particularly low motivation, weak metacognitive skills and poor self-regulation. These factors collectively shape how students approach learning tasks and determine the quality of their academic engagement.

Therefore, addressing poor study habits requires a shift from external explanations of academic performance to a deeper focus on internal cognitive and behavioural processes. Enhancing students' willingness and ability to engage in effortful thinking is essential for improving learning outcomes.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhancement of Student Motivation:

Educational institutions should adopt strategies that foster intrinsic motivation, such as engaging teaching methods, goal-oriented learning, and academic support systems that encourage active participation.

2. Development of Metacognitive Skills:

Students should be trained to develop metacognitive abilities, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning processes. This can be achieved through structured study skills programmes and guided learning activities.

3. Promotion of Self-Regulated Learning: Institutions should implement interventions that strengthen students' self-regulation skills, such as time management training, goal-setting, and self-discipline practices.

4. Incorporation of Cognitive Engagement Strategies: Teaching approaches should emphasise critical thinking, problem-solving, and deep learning to reduce reliance on low-effort cognitive processes.

5. Student Awareness Programs:

Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate students on the impact of intellectual laziness and the importance of sustained cognitive effort in achieving academic success.

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