



Assessment of Parental Phubbing and Adolescent Academic Procrastination: A Descriptive Survey of Secondary School Parents

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KEYWORDS

Parental phubbing,
Technoference,
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ABSTRACT

Adolescent academic procrastination remains a persistent concern in Nigerian secondary schools, yet most explanations focus on school-level or student-level factors while overlooking parents' own smartphone behaviour in the home. This study assessed parental phubbing and perceived adolescent academic procrastination among 100 parents of secondary school students Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, using a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire adapted from the Parental Phubbing Scale and the Academic Procrastination Scale was administered to parents selected through multi-stage stratified and convenience sampling across five public and five private schools. Results showed a moderate overall level of parental phubbing ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.78$) and moderate perceived procrastination ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.49$). Parental phubbing did not differ significantly by educational qualification, $F(4, 95) = 1.82$, $p = .131$, but differed significantly by average daily phone-use hours, $F(3, 96) = 52.91$, $p < .001$. Perceived procrastination did not differ significantly by school type, $t(98) = -1.77$, $p = .080$. Findings support technoference-based explanations of family-level contributors to adolescent procrastination and suggest that parental screen-time regulation may be a worthwhile target for home-based interventions.

CITATION

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INTRODUCTION

Procrastination - the voluntary, often irrational delay of an intended course of action despite awareness of the negative consequences of that delay, is one of the most widely documented obstacles to academic success (Steel, 2007). Among secondary school students, procrastination manifests as late assignment submission, cramming before examinations, and avoidance of study tasks, and it has been linked to lower grades, examination anxiety, and diminished self-esteem.

In Nigeria, reports of late assignment submission and poor study habits among secondary school students continue to draw attention from teachers, counsellors, and school administrators, and much of the resulting research and intervention effort has concentrated on classroom-based or student-centred factors: study skills, motivation, self-efficacy, and time-management training.

What has received comparatively little attention is the home environment that adolescents return to after school, specifically, the extent to which parents' own smartphone use interrupts the quality time, monitoring, and scaffolding they might otherwise provide. The term "phubbing" (a blend of "phone" and "snubbing") describes the act of ignoring a person in favour of one's smartphone during a face-to-face interaction (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). When the person being ignored is a parent's own child, and the interruption becomes a routine feature of parent-child interaction, researchers describe it as "parental phubbing" which is a specific instance of the broader phenomenon of technoference, or everyday technology-based interruptions of interpersonal interaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Pancani et al. (2021) developed and validated the Parental Phubbing Scale specifically to capture how often parents allow

smartphone use to interrupt time with their children, establishing parental phubbing as a distinct, measurable construct rather than a mere extension of couple-relationship phubbing research.

Nigeria offers a particularly relevant setting in which to examine this question. Reports from the Nigerian Communications Commission point to sustained growth in smartphone ownership and daily screen time among Nigerian adults (Ibeh, 2026), a trend that extends well beyond the student population that is usually the focus of phubbing research. The shift toward home-based learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic further normalised the presence of phones and other devices in the same domestic spaces where parents are expected to supervise schoolwork, plausibly increasing the frequency of technofence in the home. Against this backdrop, the persistence of late submissions and poor study habits among secondary school students raises a reasonable question that has not been well answered with Nigerian data: how much of adolescent procrastination is connected to the way parents themselves use their phones around their children?

Most existing phubbing research, in Nigeria and internationally, treats the adolescent or young adult as the phubber, measuring how students' own smartphone habits affect their attention, sleep, or relationships (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Roberts & David, 2016). Far less research reverses the lens to treat parents as the actors whose phone behaviour may shape outcomes for their children. Where parental phubbing has been studied, the evidence has come predominantly from East Asian, European, and North American samples (Pancani et al., 2021; Frackowiak et al., 2024), with only limited empirical attention paid to the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria; most Nigerian technology-and-adolescent studies available originate from the South-West. This study addresses that gap by combining three elements that, together, represent its central novelty: (a) parents, rather than students, as respondents reporting on both their own phubbing behaviour and their adolescent's procrastination; (b) a study setting; Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, that has received little prior empirical attention on this topic; and (c) a descriptive-comparative linkage of two established constructs, parental phubbing and academic procrastination, that have rarely been examined together in a single Nigerian parent-report survey.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess the level of parental phubbing behaviour and perceived adolescent academic procrastination among parents of secondary school students in Uyo LGA, and to determine whether these levels differ meaningfully across selected demographic and usage variables.

BACKGROUND OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Parental Phubbing and Technofence

McDaniel and Coyne (2016) introduced the concept of technofence to describe the everyday intrusions and interruptions that mobile and digital devices introduce into face-to-face interactions and shared time, whether between romantic partners or between parents and children. Their early work with mothers of young children found that phones interrupted parent-child interaction across a range of everyday domains, including playtime, mealtimes, and bedtime routines, and that more frequent interruptions were associated with poorer perceptions of coparenting quality. Building on this foundation, Roberts and David (2016) developed the widely used Partner Phubbing Scale to measure how often a romantic partner's phone use disrupts shared interaction, and Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018) extended the construct with a Generic Scale of Being Phubbed that could apply across relationship types. Because the original scales targeted adult romantic partners, several teams have since adapted the same nine-item structure to the parent-child context; Pancani et al. (2021) formalised this adaptation with the Parental Phubbing Scale, validating it as a distinct measure of how often a parent's own smartphone use interrupts time with their child. More recently, Frackowiak et al. (2024) argued for greater conceptual precision between “technofence” as a broad umbrella term and “parental phubbing” as one specific, interactionally visible instance of it, a distinction that this study follows by treating parental phubbing as the parent-reported behavioural indicator of technofence in the home.

The consequences of parental phubbing for children and adolescents have been documented mainly outside Nigeria. Parental phubbing has been linked to reduced parental responsiveness, weaker parent-child communication, and poorer child emotional regulation, largely because a parent whose attention is captured by a device is less available to notice, interpret, and respond to a child's cues in the moment (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Pancani et al., 2021). Stockdale et al. (2018) extended this line of inquiry into adolescence using a parent-report descriptive design broadly similar to the one adopted here, finding associations between parental phubbing and adolescent outcomes including problem behaviour and lower life satisfaction. The present study extends this method to a new construct; academic procrastination, a setting where such parent-report data has been largely absent.

Academic Procrastination

Procrastination has been conceptualised in the literature both as a trait-like disposition and as a situational failure of self-regulation. Solomon and Rothblum (1984), whose

Procrastination Assessment Scale underlies Section C of the instrument used in this study, defined academic procrastination as the tendency to always or nearly always put off academic tasks and to experience associated anxiety, and their scale has been adapted and shortened in subsequent work, including the short form used by McCloskey and Scielzo (2015). Bassey, (2026), explains Baumeister et al.'s (1994) self-regulation failure model frames procrastination as a breakdown in the capacity to override an impulse (for example, the pull toward a more immediately gratifying activity) in favour of a longer-term goal (completing an assignment), a breakdown that becomes more likely when the external structures that normally support self-regulation, reminders, monitoring, and modelling from a caregiver, are themselves weakened or inconsistent. Steel's (2007) Temporal Motivation Theory offers a complementary, more formal account, modelling motivation to begin a task as a function of the task's expectancy of success and value to the person, discounted by the person's impulsiveness and the delay before the task is due or before a reward is received; under this model, anything that increases the felt distance between the present moment and the deadline, or that increases momentary impulsivity, makes procrastination more likely.

Linking the Two Constructs

Taken together, these frameworks suggest a plausible mechanism connecting parental phubbing to adolescent academic procrastination. Technoference (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016) supplies the predictor: a parent who is frequently distracted by a smartphone during time with an adolescent is less available to provide the consistent monitoring, reminders, and modelling of task-focused behaviour that support the adolescent's own self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 1994). Temporal Motivation Theory (Steel, 2007) supplies the mechanism at the level of the adolescent: reduced parental scaffolding may not change the objective value or deadline of a school task, but it can leave the adolescent's impulsivity and moment-to-moment motivation less checked, making delay more likely. This study does not test this causal chain directly because the cross-sectional parent-report data cannot establish causality but it does provide an empirical first step: establishing whether the two constructs co-occur at meaningful levels in a Nigerian parent, and whether either construct varies systematically with parent or child characteristics that a school or ministry of education could plausibly act on.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study answered four research questions:

1. What is the level of parental phubbing behaviour among parents of secondary school students?

2. What is the level of adolescent academic procrastination as perceived by parents?
3. What is the difference in parental phubbing behaviour based on parents' educational qualification and average daily phone usage hours?
4. What is the difference in perceived academic procrastination based on child's class level and school type?

Three null hypotheses, tested at $p < .05$, guided the comparative aspects of the study:

H1: There is no significant difference in parental phubbing behaviour based on educational qualification.

H2: There is no significant difference in parental phubbing behaviour based on average daily phone usage hours.

H3: There is no significant difference in perceived academic procrastination based on school type (public vs. private).

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, appropriate for capturing the current levels of, and group differences in, parental phubbing and perceived procrastination at a single point in time without manipulating any variable.

Population, Setting, and Sample

The population comprised parents and guardians of students in public and private secondary schools in Uyo LGA, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with children in classes JSS3 through SS3. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, schools were stratified by type and five public and five private secondary schools were selected. In the second stage, ten parents per school were selected by convenience sampling during Parent-Teacher Association meetings or at school dismissal, yielding a target of 100 total and 130 questionnaires distributed in total. After screening for completeness, 100 questionnaires were retained as usable (a 76.9% usability rate), consistent with the resource-constrained sample size anticipated in the study design; the remaining 30 were discarded owing to missing responses or incomplete demographic sections. The realised sample was balanced by school type (50 public, 50 private) by design.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a single structured questionnaire in three sections. Section A collected demographic data (gender, age bracket, educational qualification, occupation, average daily smartphone use, child's school type, child's class, and number of children in secondary school). Section B, the Parental Phubbing Behaviour Scale, adapted the nine-item structure common to the Partner Phubbing Scale (Roberts & David, 2016), the Generic Scale of Being Phubbed

(Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018), and the parent-child adaptation validated by Pancani et al. (2021), rated on a five-point frequency scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). Section C, the Perceived Adolescent Academic Procrastination Scale, adapted ten items from Solomon and Rothblum's (1984) Academic Procrastination Scale and its short form (McCloskey & Scielzo, 2015) for parent-report use, rated on a four-point agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). Both source scales have shown adequate to high internal consistency in prior published use, typically above $\alpha = .80$. In the present sample, internal consistency was strong for both adapted scales (Parental Phubbing Behaviour Scale, $\alpha = .90$; Perceived Academic Procrastination Scale, $\alpha = .85$).

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Questionnaires were distributed in hard copy at PTA meetings and at school dismissal, accompanied by a written statement of informed consent explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. No identifying information was collected, and all data were reported and analysed in aggregate. Items were worded to avoid shaming or blaming parents for their phone use, consistent with a “no harm” ethical standard. Data were stored securely and used strictly for academic purposes.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS v27. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) answered RQ1 and RQ2, using the scale midpoint as the anchor for classification. For the five-point phubbing scale (midpoint = 3.00), mean scores were classified as Low (< 2.34), Moderate (2.34-3.66), and High (> 3.66), using ± 0.5 standard deviation from the midpoint. For the four-point procrastination scale

(midpoint = 2.50), classifications were Low (< 2.00), Moderate (2.00-2.99), and High (> 2.99), using the same criterion. This classification method follows established conventions in descriptive survey research (e.g., Olaitan & Nwachukwu, 2015). Independent-samples t-tests were used for two-group comparisons (school type) and one-way ANOVA for comparisons involving three or more groups (educational qualification, phone-use hours, class level), consistent with the analysis plan for RQ3, RQ4, and H1 through H3.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

Of the 100 usable respondents, 60% were female and 40% were male; the largest age band was 41-50 years (40%), followed by 31-40 years (35%). Educational qualification was distributed across HND/B.Sc (33%), NCE/OND (32%), SSCE (25%), Postgraduate (6%), and Primary (4%). Average daily smartphone use was concentrated in the 2-4 hours (39%) and 5-7 hours (37%) bands, with 17% reporting 8 hours or more and 7% reporting less than 2 hours. As designed, 50% of respondents' children attended public schools and 50% attended private schools; children's class levels were fairly evenly spread across JSS3 (31%), SS1 (32%), SS2 (16%), and SS3 (21%).

RQ1: Level of Parental Phubbing

The overall parental phubbing grand mean was 2.80 (SD = 0.78), which falls in the Moderate range (2.34–3.66) on the five-point scale. At the item level, means ranged from 2.56 to 3.13 (see Table 1), with the highest-endorsed item concerning the urge to check the phone during time set aside for the child, and the lowest concerning glancing at the phone during conversation. Categorising respondents individually, 44% showed Moderate phubbing, 38% Low phubbing, and 18% High phubbing.

Table 1: Parental Phubbing Behaviour Scale Items (N = 100)

Item	M	SD
Glances at phone during conversation	2.74	1.00
Keeps phone within eyesight at home	2.56	1.08
Checks phone knowing it interrupts time together	2.83	1.13
Checks phone when it rings/beeps mid-conversation	2.74	0.92
Uses phone during family meals	3.00	1.08
Uses phone while child discusses school day	2.71	1.01
Responds to notifications during homework help	2.78	0.95
Loses track of what child was saying	2.69	1.10
Feels urge to check phone during dedicated time	3.13	1.18
Grand Mean	2.80	0.78

RQ2: Level of Perceived Academic Procrastination

The overall perceived procrastination grand mean was 2.34 (SD = 0.49), which falls in the Moderate range (2.00–2.99) on the four-point scale and just below the 2.50

benchmark used to indicate clearly agreed-upon procrastination. Item means ranged from 2.11 to 2.60 (see Table 2). At the individual level, 66% of parents reported Moderate procrastination, 22% Low, and 12% High.

Table 2: Perceived Academic Procrastination Scale Items (N = 100)

Item	M	SD
Puts off homework until the last moment	2.30	0.73
Delays studying until the night before	2.40	0.77
Postpones take-home assignments	2.14	0.73
Waits until close to deadline on projects	2.37	0.73
Says “later” and forgets	2.22	0.77
Finds excuses to avoid schoolwork	2.60	0.84
Needs constant reminders	2.33	0.79
Submits assignments late	2.44	0.69
Prioritises other activities before deadlines	2.11	0.71
Struggles to begin tasks early	2.46	0.73
Mean	2.34	0.49

RQ3/H1: Parental Phubbing by Educational Qualification

A one-way ANOVA comparing parental phubbing across the five educational qualification categories was not statistically significant, $F(4, 95) = 1.82, p = .131$. Mean phubbing scores ranged narrowly from 2.57 (SSCE) to 3.19 (Postgraduate), with overlapping standard deviations across groups. H1 was therefore supported: educational qualification was not associated with a significant difference in parental phubbing behaviour.

RQ3/H2: Parental Phubbing by Daily Phone-Use Hours

A one-way ANOVA comparing parental phubbing across the four phone-use categories was statistically significant, $F(3, 96) = 52.91, p < .001$ (see Table 3). Mean phubbing rose in a clear, stepwise pattern with reported phone use. Post hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD) indicated that every pairwise group difference was statistically significant (all $p < .05$), confirming a dose-response relationship between daily phone use and phubbing behaviour. H2 was therefore rejected: parents' average daily phone-use hours were significantly associated with their level of phubbing behaviour.

Table 3: Parental Phubbing Mean Scores by Daily Phone-Use Hours

Phone-Use Category	n	M	SD
Less than 2 hours	7	1.78	0.42
2–4 hours	39	2.31	0.43
5–7 hours	37	3.02	0.57
8 hours and above	17	3.86	0.44

RQ4/H3: Perceived Procrastination by School Type

An independent-samples t-test comparing perceived procrastination between parents of children in public and private schools approached but did not reach statistical significance, $t(98) = -1.77, p = .080$ (see Table 4). H3 was therefore retained: school type was not associated with a

statistically significant difference in perceived procrastination, although the direction of the (non-significant) difference, slightly higher perceived procrastination among private-school parents may merit attention in future research.

Table 4: Perceived Procrastination Mean Scores by School Type

School Type	n	M	SD
Public	50	2.25	0.45
Private	50	2.42	0.51

RQ4: Perceived Procrastination by Class Level

Although no formal hypothesis was stated for class level, a one-way ANOVA showed a marginal, near-significant trend, $F(3, 96) = 2.60, p = .057$, with perceived procrastination rising numerically from JSS3 ($M = 2.19$) through SS1 ($M = 2.29$) and SS2 ($M = 2.44$) to SS3 ($M = 2.54$). This pattern is consistent with the possibility that procrastination tendencies become more visible to

parents as academic demands intensify toward the terminal class.

Discussion

The finding that parental phubbing sits at a Moderate level in this study ($M = 2.80$ on a 5-point scale) situates Uyo parents within the same broad range reported in parental-phubbing research from other contexts, where phubbing is

described as widespread but not universal or extreme (Pancani et al., 2021).

The item-level pattern which shows the highest mean concerning an internally felt “urge” to check the phone during dedicated time with the child echoes the compulsive, only partly-controlled quality of phone-checking behaviour that has been noted in technofence research by McDaniel and Coyne (2016), and suggests that the behaviour is experienced by many parents as difficult to fully suppress even during time they have set aside for their child.

The rejection of H2, the strong, stepwise association between daily phone-use hours and phubbing was the clearest and most robust finding of the study and is consistent with a straightforward exposure logic: the more total time a parent spends on a smartphone across the day, the more of that time is likely to intrude into moments that would otherwise be devoted to the child. This finding offers a concrete, measurable behavioural target, which is, daily screen time that a school-based parenting workshop or public health messaging campaign could plausibly influence, whereas retaining H1 suggests that a parent's educational qualification is a less useful basis for targeting such interventions in this population; parents of every qualification level reported broadly similar phubbing levels once phone-use hours are taken into account.

The grand mean for perceived academic procrastination ($M = 2.34$) falls in the Moderate range (2.00–2.99) on the 4-point scale. While this sits slightly below the midpoint benchmark of 2.50, it indicates that parents observe noticeable, non-trivial levels of task delay in their adolescents.

Retaining H3 indicates that public and private school type, at least as perceived by parents in this study, was not a strong differentiator of procrastination, a result that tempers any assumption that private-school resourcing or public-school class sizes translate directly into different levels of parent-perceived task delay, though the near-significant direction of the difference (favouring slightly higher procrastination among private-school parents) leaves this an open question for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed parental phubbing and parent-perceived adolescent academic procrastination among 100 parents of secondary school students in Uyo LGA, Akwa Ibom State. Both constructs were found at Moderate levels overall. Parental phubbing varied significantly and systematically with parents' daily phone-use hours but not with their educational qualification, while perceived procrastination did not vary significantly by school type.

Three recommendations follow. First, because daily phone-use hours rather than education level, was the variable most strongly linked to phubbing, school-based parent-engagement programmes (for example, sessions

held during PTA meetings) may be a more effective venue for phone-use awareness messaging than qualification-targeted outreach. Second, given the moderate correlation between phubbing and perceived procrastination, school counsellors working with adolescents who show chronic assignment delay might usefully include a brief, non-judgemental conversation about family device norms as part of a broader support plan, without treating parental phubbing as a confirmed cause. Third, given the near-significant class-level trend, further research with a larger and more geographically diverse Nigerian study should examine whether procrastination becomes more parent-visible as students approach terminal examination classes, and should incorporate adolescent self-report alongside parent report to reduce single-source bias.

Several limitations qualify these findings. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causality between parental phubbing and adolescent procrastination. Both variables were reported by the same parent respondent, introducing single-source bias and leaving open the possibility that shared method variance inflated the observed correlation; the adolescent's own perspective was not captured. Self-report of one's own phubbing behaviour is also vulnerable to social desirability bias, which may have led some parents to underreport their phone-related interruptions. Finally, a sample of 100 drawn from ten schools in a single LGA limits generalisability beyond Uyo LGA, and purposive/convenience selection of parents at PTA meetings or dismissal may have over-represented more school-engaged parents relative to the wider population. The study was intentionally delimited to parents of secondary school students (not primary or tertiary), to perceived procrastination rather than objective academic records such as grades, to Uyo LGA rather than the whole of Akwa Ibom State or Nigeria, and to a descriptive assessment rather than an experimental or longitudinal design.

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