

Effects of Task Difficulty and Perception of Distributive Justice on Social Loafing Among Senior Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigated effects of task difficulty and perception of distributive justice on social loafing.

Methodology: Twenty-eight (28) participants comprising 14 males (50%) and 14 Females (50%) randomly selected from a population of Senior Secondary 2 Students (SS2) in Foundation Comprehensive College Okoloma Afam, Oyibo Local Government Area, Rivers State participated in the study. Participants were drawn using purposive sampling technique and the simple random sampling techniques. The ages of participants ranged between 14 – 15 years and their mean age was 14.75 years. The study was experimental. The perception of distributive justice scale and social loafing scale were the instruments used in the study. The design of the study was a 2x2 Factorial Design. A 2-way Analysis of Variance was employed for data analysis.

Findings: The results of the study revealed that task difficulty has a significant effect of on social loafing ($F(1, 27) = 5.48; P < 0.5$). The results also revealed that perception of distributive justice has a significant effect on social loafing ($F(1, 27) = 11.14; P < 0.5$). In addition, results revealed no significant interaction effect between task difficulty and perception of distributive justice on social loafing.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: Implications and recommendations were made on the basis of the findings of the study.

Key Words: *Task Difficulty, Perception of Distributive Justice, Social Loafing, Senior Secondary School Students.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Groups are indispensable to humans. Groups stimulate creativity and also promote satisfaction when decisions are made on a collective basis (Babe & Masterson, 2000). In addition, many important tasks that cannot be performed individually are accomplished as a group (Karau & Williams, 1993). Working as a group is also becoming a common component both in the corporate and educational settings (Bruckner, Harkins & Ostrom, 2000). In educational settings, it makes it possible for learning to be efficient and also makes students to be more responsive to issues emerging from complex study situations (Haythomthwaite, 2006). In spite of the advantages associated with working in groups, research has revealed that a situation occurs whereby some members of the group tend to reduce their efforts or contributions when working in groups compared to when working individually (Karau & Williams, 1993). This phenomenon is referred to as Social Loafing.

Piccolo, Powell and Ives (2004) define Social Loafing as the phenomenon whereby a person exerts less effort when he or she works in a group compared to when working alone. Lantane, Williams and Harkins (1998) revealed that social loafing is manifested when some members of a group do not put in their effort because of the assumption that the efforts of other members of the group will cover up their short fall. This leads to under performance and is known as the free-rider effect. Also, sucker effect is manifested when other members of the group who put in much effort (performers) reduce their efforts in response to the free riders attitude (Snook, 2000). In addition, Piezon and Donaldson (2005) state that when people work individually, they feel that they are responsible for completing the task, but when they work in groups, this feeling of responsibility diffuses to others and it leads to a decline in efforts. Furthermore, Mefoh and Nwanosike (2012), found that people work harder individually when completing a task compared to when working in a group.

The Self Attention Theory by Mullen (1983) provides the theoretical basis for the study. This theory assumes that self attention is the underlying factor in social loafing. By this theory, when individuals perform a task collectively, there is a decrease in self awareness and this leads to individuals disregarding salient performance standards, thereby engaging in less self regulation. In other words, when individuals perform a task collectively, they are less attentive to the demands of the task as well as the standards of performance, compared to when working alone. This leads to social loafing.

Research has shown that social loafing is detrimental to groups because it reduces the efficiency of the group, leads to a decline in the level of motivation and cohesiveness in the group in response to the presence and perception of social loafing. This negative emotional reactions to the perception of social loafing in the group may lead to other members of the group reducing their contributions (Furumo, 2009).

Studies have revealed that 31% of students loaf in group work, while 30% of undergraduates acknowledged that they have engaged in social loafing at least once during their academic pursuit (Coohey, 1995). In Nigeria, Thompson (2009), revealed that about 30% of males and 17% of females reported high social loafing attitudes in school, and Daniel (2005) found that 42% of male and 34% of female undergraduates reported a positive attitude towards social loafing. This study is interested in investigating social loafing among Senior Secondary School Students. The reason for this is that most of the studies that have been conducted to investigate social loafing have been carried out in work / organizational settings. Few empirical studies have been conducted to examine social loafing in educational settings in Nigeria. There is also

paucity of literature on social loafing among Senior Secondary School Students in Nigeria. This study will therefore focus on this area, assist students in understanding better the effects of social loafing on students' teams in Secondary School, it will also assist educators in identifying and deterring problems related to Social Loafing among Secondary School Students.

This background necessitated the investigation of effects of task difficulty and perception of distributive justice on social loafing among Senior Secondary School Students in Oyibo Local Government Area of Rivers State. Studies have already implicated task difficulty in social loafing. For instance, Tuckman and Jensen (2000) found that when students are given tasks that are complex to perform in a group, some members of the group are more likely to loaf because they believe they lack the ability to complete the task thereby leaving the task to those they believe are better than them in performing the task. In addition, Samuel and Samuel (2012) revealed that when a task is not complex, group members are excited to contribute as they believe the task is within their mental ability and are therefore less likely to loaf. Furthermore, students who perceive that a task is simple tend to participate more in a group work, while those who think theirs is complex are more prone to social loafing as a means of escaping from responsibilities (Laslett, Room, Dietze & Ferris, 2012).

Perception of distributive justice has also been documented as a factor affecting social loafing. Students tend to loaf in a team when they feel there is an unfair distribution of reward. They feel dissatisfied with the team and withhold their contribution because they feel there is injustice in the distribution of rewards (Laslett, Room, Dietze & Ferris, 2012). On the contrary, when students perceive outcomes to be fairly distributed, they become satisfied with their reward and are less likely to loaf (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005). In addition, Krant and Resnick (2006) reported that the better the perception of distributive justice, the less likely individuals will loaf.

Main Research Objective

This study therefore investigated effects of task difficulty and perception of distributive justice on social loafing among senior secondary school students in Oyibo local Government Area, River State.

Specific objectives

Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- i. To determine whether task difficulty will affect social loafing among students
- ii. To determine whether perception of distributive justice will affect social loafing among students.

Research Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that:

1. Students who perform complex tasks will engage more in social loafing compared to students who perform simple tasks
2. Students with a fair perception of distributive justice will engage less in social loafing compared to students with an unfair perception of distributive justice.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was experimental and adopted a 2x2 factorial design. Task difficulty (complex task vs simple task) and perception of distributive justice (fair vs unfair) were the independent variables, while social loafing was the dependent variable.

Participants and Setting

Participants in the study consisted of twenty-eight (28) senior secondary 2 students comprising 14 males (50%) and 14 females (50%) selected from population of senior secondary 2 students in Foundation Comprehensive College Okoloma Afam, Oyibo local Government Area, River State. Oyibo Local Government Area also called Obigbo is a town 30 kilometers from the Port City of Port Harcourt and a local Government Area in River State Nigeria, lying East of Port Harcourt, South of the new highway (A3 motor way) that runs from Aba to Port Harcourt and West of the Murkey Imo River (Adeyemi, 2018) Oyibo Local Government Area lies 4° 52' 41" N latitude and 7° 7' 42" E longitude and has a population of about 125,331 (National Population Commission and National Bureau of Statistics Estimates, 2006).

Sampling Techniques

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in the study. Purposive sampling method was used to select the class, while simple random sampling method was used to select the actual participants for the study. Only senior secondary 2 students participated in the study.

Instrument

The instruments used for the study include newspapers, bowls, hot water, starch, cast or mold (egg crate), beads, beading thread, wire cutter, crimp beads, super glue, closures, and a clock. A structured questionnaire was also used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire had three sections:

Section A (Demographics). This contained information such as gender and age

Section B (Perception of Distributive Justice Scale). The perception of distributive justice scale developed by Welbourne, Balkin and Gomez-Mejia (1995) is a 4-item scale designed to measure the perceived fairness of how rewards are distributed across group members. It is designed in a 5-point Likert type format ranging from 1=disagree to 5= strongly disagree. The perception of distributive justice scale scores ranges between 4 – 20.

The norm of the instrument is 7. It has a Cronbach alpha of 0.91.

Section C (Social Loafing Scale). Social loafing scale developed by Deleau (2017) is a 10-item scale designed to measure the level of loafing and individual engages in during a group assignment. It is designed in a 5-point Likert type format ranging from 1=not a characteristic of me to 5= very characteristic of me. The social loafing scale scores ranges between 10-50, and the norm of the instrument is 21.22. It has a Cronbach alpha of 0.90.

Procedure

A letter of introduction was obtained from the department of psychology; University of Uyo and due permission was obtained from the Principal of the school. Participants were approached in their classes, and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Participants indicated willingness to participate in the study.

Participants were randomly selected from a population of 38 SS2 students by being asked to pick folded pieces of paper on which “yes” or “no” was written. Those who picked “yes” participated in the study. In addition, participants were randomly assigned into groups by also being asked to pick folded pieces of paper on which “1” or “2” was written. Participants who picked 1 were assigned to the complex task group, while participants who picked 2 were assigned to the simple task group.

Before the experiment, participants in each of the group were shown a sample of what they were expected to produce, and guidelines on how to perform the tasks was provided. The complex task group made up of 7 males and 7 females was shown a sample of an egg crate and a crocodile made using papier-mache, while the simple task group also made up 7 males and 7 females was shown a sample of a well-made bead necklace. Participants in each of the group were told to indicate whether they had performed the task assigned to their group before. They were instructed to work as a team, were informed that equal scores will be awarded to members of each group, and also told that the task was to be completed in 40 minutes. After 40 minutes, participants were asked to stop work. The experiment was conducted in the Home Economics Laboratory of the school.

The perception of distributive justice scale and social loafing scale were administered to participants in both groups after the experiment. They were instructed to respond to the items on the questionnaires based on their experiences with the group task. A total of 28 copies of instruments were administered and retrieved.

Statistics

A Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed for data analysis.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Hypothesis one stated that students who perform complex task will engage more in social loafing compared to students who perform simple task. This was tested using 2-Way Analysis of variance (ANOVA). Summary of results is presented on Table 1 below

Table 1: Summary of 2-Way ANOVA Table Showing the Main and Interaction Effects of Task Difficulty and Perception of Distributives Justice on Social Loafing.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	P
Task difficulty	492.766	1	492.766	5.48	<.05
Perception of distributive justice	1001.702	1	1001.702	11.14	<.05
Task difficulty* Perception of distributive justice	225.213	1	225.213	2.505	>.05
Error	2158.07	24	89.92		
Corrected total	3598.714	27			

The results in Table 1 reveals that task difficulty has a significant effect on social loafing among secondary schools students ($F(1, 27) = 5.48; P < .05$). Therefore, the hypothesis was confirmed.

Hypothesis two stated that students with a fair perception of distributive justice will engage less in social loafing compared to students with an unfair perception of distributive justice. This was also tested using 2-way ANOVA. Summary of results is presented on Table 1 above.

The results on table 1 also reveals that perception of distributive justice has a significant effect on social loafing among secondary school students ($F(1, 27) = 11.14; P < .05$). The hypothesis was also confirmed.

Furthermore, the results on Table 1 reveals no significant interaction effect between task difficulty and perception of distributive justice on social loafing among secondary school students ($f(1,27) = 2.51; P > .05$).

4.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Firstly, the result of this study showed that task difficulty has a significant effect on social loafing among secondary school students. In this study, task difficulty affected social loafing. This finding supports the findings of Tuckman and Jensen (2000), who found that when students are given complex tasks to perform in a group, some members of the group are more likely to loaf because they believe they lack the ability to complete the task there by leaving the task to those they believe are better than them in performing the task. The finding of the study is also consistent with the findings of Samuel and Samuel (2012) who revealed that when a task is not complex, group members are excited to contribute as they believe the task is within their mental ability and are therefore less likely to loaf. The finding of this study is also in line with the findings of Laslett, Room, Dietze and Ferris (2012), who reported that students who perceive that a task is simple tend to participate more in a group work, while those who think theirs is complex are more prone to social loafing. A plausible explanation for this is that these students who are assigned complex task tend to be overwhelmed by this task and have learned to be helpless.

Secondly, the result of this study revealed that perception of distributive justice has a significant effect on social loafing. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Krant and Resnick (2006), and Laslett et al (2012) who found that when students feel there is an unfair distribution of reward, they withhold their contributions because they are dissatisfied with the group. A plausible explanation for this is that students with an unfair perception of distributive justice believe their reward is not commensurate with the efforts put in by individual members of the group towards achieving the task and therefore loaf because they feel cheated.

Conclusively, this study investigated effects of task difficulty and Perception of Distributive Justice on Social Loafing among Secondary School Students, a total of 28 Senior Secondary School Students participated in the study. Results showed that task difficulty and perception of distributive justice affected social loafing. The implication is that the level of difficulty of a task and one's level of perception of distributive justice increases the degree of Social Loafing.

The level of difficulty of a task should be evaluated before deciding on whether the task should be completed individually or as a group. The importance of working as a group should be emphasized to students since most of the task performed both in educational settings as well as organizational settings are better achieved as a team.

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