

The Hidden Trap of Entitlement in Student Life: Work Matters More Than Anticipation

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Abstract

This article addresses the emerging trend of academic entitlement and its effect on student's academic performance, social relationships, and personal development. Entitlement is a belief that a student is owed to success, reward, and praise irrespective of effort or accomplishment. The paper deals with the psychological origins of entitlement, how entitlement is expressed among students' behaviours, and how it affects learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, the paper speaks to the strain that the sense of entitlement has on peers, especially in group work and student-teacher relationship. The paper provides practical solutions to the move from entitlement to a growth mindset, where there is stress on responsibility, self-awareness, and resilience for success in education. The paper establishes that success comes as a result of effort and responsibility, and not expectations or extrinsic reinforcement.

Keywords: Entitlement, Resilience, Extrinsic reinforcement

1. Introduction

In the modern academic environment, a silent trap frequently goes undetected among students, the sense of entitlement. Numerous students feel that they are entitled to high grades, special favours, or rewards merely for attending or attempting, without actually deserving them (Chowning&Campbell,2009). Anticipating success without accountability can damage a student's learning, relationships, and future development (Ellis et al., 2022). This article discusses how entitlement arises during student life, its impact, and how a change in attitude can bring actual accomplishment and self-improvement.

2. Understanding Student Entitlement

Entitlement among students is the persistent belief that one should receive academic success regardless of one's performance (Chowning& Campbell,2009). A high level of entitlement has generally been considered as a negative trait which may lead to a variety of maladaptive behaviours including greed, selfishness, lack of self-control and aggression

(Campbel et al.,2004, Raskin&Terry,1988, Pryor et al.,2008). Entitled attitude stems from consumerist mentality of the students in academic settings (Jackson et al., 2010). and a combination of outside influences such as parenting approaches, cultural expectations, and educational systems that occasionally overemphasize effort or participation over actual success (Preston &Boswell,2015).

3. What Does Entitlement Look Like?

Entitled students demonstrate such behaviours as expecting straight A grades without sufficient hard work (Kopp & Finney, 2013) or accusing teachers when they do not receive what they wish for (Bertl et al., 2019). For instance, a student who scores 70% in an examination may claim that they "deserve" an 80% or 90% since they "worked hard." They don't see that outcomes are not about working, but rather about comprehension, application, and precision. For instance, a student may claim extra credit based on the fact that they feel entitled to it without displaying effort or improvement initially. Such behaviours can interfere with student's learning process and cause friction in their relationship with friends and teachers (Knepp & Knepp, 2022).

4. The Psychological Origins of Entitlement

Student entitlement does not arise overnight. It is usually fostered by a combination of psychological elements and environmental pressures. Parents, teachers, and society may unintentionally help to create an entitled attitude by rewarding participation rather than the quality of work (Peng et al., 2024). If a child is rewarded for going to school, not being challenged to try to learn and master the material, they can grow up believing that effort alone is sufficient. This is a trend that is more prevalent in an era where instant gratification is the standard (Denial, 2023). Social media, gaming, and entertainment sites frequently reward users for doing a little, so there is an expectation that they will be rewarded for making the slightest efforts (Nichole & Gotschall, 2015).

5. Effect on Learning

5.1 Less Effort and Accountability

If students feel they should succeed for just putting minimal effort, then they lose their initiative to struggle with academics (Tyner & Petrilli, 2018). As a consequence of this, superficial learning emerges. For instance, a learner may go for lectures but neglect taking notes on the information delivered because he believes attending the sessions is enough to absorb the content. As they keep doing the minimum, the quality of work and grade deteriorates. As they have an attitude of entitlement, they tend not to link their lack of effort with poor performance (Kinne et al., 2022). This disconnect from reality to expectation can bring about frustration, disappointment, and overall perception of injustice (Boswell, 2024).

5.2 Poor Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking

Those who have an entitled attitude, avoid situations that require them to think critically or to solve a problem. They might consider difficult assignments to be "unfair" or "too difficult" and thus don't exert the effort needed to sort things out (Anderson et al., 2014). Rather than viewing problems with patience and persistence, they expect things to happen easily, restricting them from thinking critically (Cain et al., 2012). Critical thinking, one of the most important skills in academics and life, is about developing ability to think independently, make well-supported decisions and solve problems creatively (Keith & Kurfiss, 1990). An entitled student will never learn this important skill because they do not engage in the hard work required for taking on difficult tasks (Knepp et al., 2022).

5.3 Fear of Failure

Privileged students can acquire an intense fear of failure since they equate achievement with worthiness (Nair & Sutar, 2023). In the event of failure, this goes against what they perceive themselves as being inherently deserving of good outcomes. The fear could prevent them from engaging in risks or experiments. Rather than perceiving failure as part of the learning process, they perceive it as a

manifestation of the world being "unfair (Jackson et al., 2010). This attitude can culminate in a pattern of procrastination (Covington, 1993), avoidance, and disengagement. Students may actively sabotage their chances of success by leaving tasks to the last minute, or by putting in little effort (Elliot & Church, 2003), and in doing so, lose out on potential learning and development.

6. Impact on Relationships

6.1 Strained Teacher-Student Relationships

Instructors frequently must walk a fine line between encouraging learners and being accountable for them. Entitled students pose a challenge to educators since they might rebel against constructive feedback, feel entitled to better grades, or demand special treatment (Kurtylmaz, 2019). This can provoke teachers and create stress in the classroom. When a student expects more than they have earned or demands to be treated differently from other students, teachers may feel undervalued or disrespected (Ellis et al., 2022). This stress can harm the student-teacher relationship and hinder the student's academic progress over time.

6.2 Tension in Group Work

Group work is an inevitable part of contemporary education, but it can be especially difficult when one group member expects others to do the work. Entitled students will think they will get the same grade as everyone else even if they do nothing or very little for the group effort (Knepp & Knepp, 2022). This attitude fosters resentment and frustration among peers, who might feel their efforts are being taken for granted (Jones, 2013). Group projects are meant to be learning experiences in collaboration, communication, and respect for one another. Values cannot be easily developed when one member of the group refuses to help out.

7. Shifting from Entitlement to Growth

7.1 The Importance of a Growth Mindset

The secret to break entitlement is to develop a growth mindset. A growth mindset is the ideology that ability can be created through hard work, effort, learning, and persistence (Jaidumrong et al., 2023). Unlike students who have a fixed mindset, those with a growth mindset view adversity as a possibility for improvement and growth (Dweck et al., 2014). In order to shift away from an attitude of entitlement, students must grasp outcomes that stem from diligence, instead of just being present (Freis, 2024). They must understand how to engage tasks with curiosity, tenacity, and resilience, realizing that effort and lessons derived from failure are essential for accomplishment.

7.2 Taking Responsibility for one's Own Learning

A critical step in overcoming entitlement is to educate students to own their learning (Kusurkar et al., 2011). This involves acknowledging responsibility for their work and knowing that grades are not earned by attendance but by effort. Students can begin with realistic academic intentions, time management, and feedback on their work (Tan, 2022). They ought to perceive error as an error in judgment for future success. Teachers and parents can teach this by providing encouragement to the effort, active participation and learning instead of focusing the end result.

7.3 Teaching Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is another mechanism that assists students in building a healthier relationship with learning (Brownhill, 2021). Through reflection on their performance and what they might have done differently, students can be held accountable for their own actions and learn from them. This promotes accountability, which is the converse of entitlement. For example, after being given feedback on an assignment, students

should pose questions such as, "What would I have done differently?" or "What was learned from this exercise?" This helps in a better grasp of the subject matter and also encourages ongoing improvement.

8. Conclusion

The long-term consequences of academic entitlement can be deeply limiting for students, both in school and beyond. When students adopt the belief that they deserve high grades or success simply by being present—rather than through hard work and commitment—it weakens their motivation, delays the development of essential life skills, and builds unrealistic expectations. This mindset can leave them unprepared for future challenges, where effort, accountability, and perseverance are crucial for real success. Left unchecked, entitlement can lead to dissatisfaction, poor performance, and difficulty in accepting failure or feedback. It also harms relationships, as entitled individuals may lack respect for others' contributions and underestimate the value of teamwork and mutual responsibility. However, if recognised and addressed early, students can unlearn this behaviour and begin building rooted in responsibility, self-discipline, and genuine effort. They come to understand that success is not something that is automatically granted, but something that is earned over time. This realisation strengthens their ability to learn, grow, and adapt—qualities that are essential not only in academics but in all aspects of life. In the end, knowing that success must be pursued, not expected, is a lesson that empowers students to achieve lasting fulfilment and resilience.

9. Reference

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