

Chronopolitics of Time: Delays, Power, and Inequality in Higher Education

Gilles Paché
CERGAM
Aix-Marseille University

Often seen as technical issues, delays profoundly shape higher education by reinforcing structural inequalities and asserting temporal control. This position paper examines how waiting affects access to academic resources, administrative services, and learning opportunities—especially for marginalized, international, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It identifies three key dimensions: temporal asymmetries that perpetuate inequality; cultural and psychological meanings associated with waiting; and the strategic use of delays as instruments of institutional power. In contexts such as enrollment, grading, or pedagogical access, delays can compromise student well-being, sense of belonging, and academic success. Drawing from immigration, labor, and geopolitics, the position paper reframes delays as socially constructed. It calls for inclusive, time-sensitive policies to foster equity in globalized academic settings.

Keywords: academic governance, chronopolitics, control, delays, inequality, power, student success, time

INTRODUCTION

For human beings, time asserts itself as an unstoppable force of annihilation: from the moment they are born, they experience time as an inescapable power that inevitably pulls them toward death (Bluedorn, 2002). No one can outrun their fate, regardless of wealth or lifestyle. In managerial practice, however, delays are far from neutral—they expose deep inequalities in how time is distributed, controlled, and experienced across different groups of consumers. While some consumers can adjust to delays depending on the purchasing situation and service environment (Baker & Cameron, 1996), others are disproportionately affected—for instance, when a child is deprived of a birthday present due to a shipping delay. A multinational corporation may view recurrent delivery delays as a minor inconvenience, but for vulnerable communities reliant on imported medicines or food, the consequences can be devastating. In short, the impact of delays is anything but uniform; it is shaped by wealth, power, geography, and access to alternatives. Bourdieu (1977 [1972]) introduced the concept of temporal habitus, illustrating how the dominant control their time while the disadvantaged are subjected to urgency and prolonged waiting. Examining delays in supply chains and bureaucratic systems reveals that time is not merely a resource—it is a contested space where privilege and precarity collide. This view aligns with the findings of Nazarov et al. (2021), who highlight how temporal disparities in access to pedagogical resources and uneven motivational conditions among future teachers contribute to educational inequalities from the outset.

The study of delays and their role in producing temporal inequalities remains significantly underexamined within higher education and pedagogical practice. Academic institutions are not exempt from mechanisms of unequal temporality: delays in accessing educational resources, prolonged

administrative approvals for new degree programs, and uneven distribution of pedagogical innovations across regions exacerbate disparities among students from diverse social backgrounds. A rigorous understanding of how time is organized and controlled within higher education is essential to developing management practices that allocate learning, assessment, and support time fairly and effectively. This theoretical framework calls for a fundamental reassessment—not only of organizational processes but also of academic governance—focusing sharply on inclusion and the reduction of temporal inequities throughout student trajectories. From this perspective, the present analysis aligns with key priority areas in higher education research (Qi & Zhang, 2024), offering a critical examination of the temporal dimensions that shape educational experiences and social realities within university systems. By highlighting the political and social significance of time, this work aims to advance more equitable and just educational environments.

The examination of higher education invites a broader reflection on the “chronopolitics” of time—how temporal structures are used to govern access, opportunity, and control across institutional settings. Beyond their material impact on students and educators, delays carry profound cultural, psychological, and political significance. Different societies interpret waiting in distinct ways: some valorize patience as a civic virtue, while others perceive delays as systemic dysfunction. These normative frameworks shape responses to disruption, ranging from passive acceptance to resistance (Leclerc & Schmitt, 2002). In academic environments as in broader society, the management of time is closely tied to questions of equity, status, and legitimacy. Priority access to educational resources, delayed accreditation processes, or prolonged approval cycles for innovation all reflect broader dynamics of exclusion. More strategically, delays can function as instruments of domination—slowing visa approvals for international students, postponing funding decisions, or deferring promotions in academic careers. As Najafi (2023) argues, the power to impose waiting is never neutral; it designates those who act as “masters of time,” reinforcing hierarchies through temporal control. Recognizing delays as active mechanisms of governance reveals the hidden structures that shape institutional life and educational trajectories.

This position paper investigates how delays become embedded in invisible socio-political hierarchies, intensifying pre-existing inequalities across societies, including within higher education. I emphasize how unequal access to resources, infrastructure, and alternatives can transform seemingly minor setbacks into significant and often compounded vulnerabilities for different groups of students and staff. Next, I analyze how cultural and psychological frameworks shape perceptions of delays: while some societies accept waiting as an inherent part of social interaction, others regard it as an intolerable failure of efficiency, especially in educational administration and institutional operations. Finally, I expose the strategic deployment of delays as a tool of power and control—whether to obstruct access to fundamental rights through bureaucratic slowdowns, dominate labor through postponed promotions or withheld information, or manipulate the distribution of educational resources and opportunities. My contribution underscores that waiting is never neutral; it is not merely the passage of time before a need is fulfilled. Rather, it reflects and reinforces entrenched power relations, highlighting the urgent necessity for equitable policies designed to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of delay, particularly on marginalized communities within higher education.

SOCIO-POLITICAL HIERARCHIES OF DELAYS

While the overarching focus of this study is on higher education, initiating the analysis with the lens of supply chain delays provides a critical point to understand the broader socio-political dynamics of temporality and inequality. Supply chains operate as complex, global systems where delays are not merely operational disruptions but reflect and reproduce entrenched power imbalances and structural disparities. By examining supply chain delays—particularly in contexts such as the COVID-19 vaccine distribution and geopolitical conflicts—we gain concrete evidence of how temporal disruptions disproportionately impact marginalized populations, revealing the mechanisms through which access to essential resources is controlled and contested. This foundational understanding of delays as socio-political phenomena provides valuable conceptual tools for interrogating similar temporal inequalities within higher education

institutions. Thus, the supply chain example functions as a paradigmatic case, illustrating the systemic nature of temporal injustice that also permeates academic governance, resource allocation, and student experiences. This approach enables a more comprehensive and nuanced critique of delays, situating them within broader frameworks of power, inclusion, and social justice.

The concept of chronopolitics of time provides here a powerful framework for understanding how temporal structures function as instruments of power. Sharma (2014) argues that time is not uniformly experienced across social groups but is distributed through regimes of domination that make certain individuals perpetually available on demand, while others retain autonomy over their time. She illustrates this dynamic through the case of immigrant cab drivers in Toronto, who must constantly adjust their schedules to meet the needs of privileged clients—clients who enjoy flexible and self-determined temporalities. This pattern of asymmetry extends beyond labor and into higher education, where similar inequalities manifest in delayed responses to student inquiries, rigid academic calendars, and pedagogical timeframes that conflict with the constraints of precarious student life, particularly for those balancing coursework with informal or irregular employment. Freeman (2010) conceptualizes chrono-normativity as the normative pressure to follow a standardized academic trajectory, characterized by graduating at a specific age, transitioning quickly into the workforce, and maintaining continuous career progress. Those who deviate from this model are often marginalized. Bastian (2012) further argues that dominant temporal regimes erase alternative ways of organizing time. Within academia, chronopolitics reveals persistent yet often invisible structures of inequality.

The chronopolitical perspective also sheds light on more mundane but equally telling manifestations of inequality. Beyond large-scale supply chain management failures—particularly those linked to non-compliance with lead times (Hofbauer & Sangl, 2018)—everyday transport delays reveal deeply entrenched economic and racial inequalities. Low-income populations, who are heavily dependent on public transit, often face delays that hinder their access to employment, education, and healthcare. By contrast, privileged groups mitigate such disruptions through ride-hailing services, personal vehicles, or remote work arrangements (Malandri et al., 2021). Even in air travel, the experience of delay varies starkly: a business traveler may encounter a minor inconvenience, while a low-wage migrant worker risks missing irreplaceable family moments, with profound emotional and social consequences. These asymmetries demonstrate that delays are not merely technical malfunctions—they are embedded in social hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusion. Temporal inequalities are equally visible in the education sector. Administrative delays and unequal access to pedagogical resources directly affect students' ability to acquire global competencies. A recent study reveals that institutional time lags frequently serve as invisible barriers, perpetuating social inequality within university systems (Francisco, 2024). These findings underscore the need for inclusive policies that mitigate temporal disparities and foster equitable learning environments. Recognizing the differential value and control of time is essential to designing fairer educational and logistical systems—ones that respect the temporal dignity of all individuals, regardless of status.

It is increasingly clear that the impact of delays is shaped by cultural norms and differing perceptions of time (see Figure 1). The way a society conceives and accepts waiting significantly influences its tolerance for delays and how these disruptions are perceived in terms of justice versus injustice. In some cultures, such as in many African societies, waiting is internalized from an early age as an unavoidable constraint or even as a necessary passage toward legitimacy or success (Hall, 1973 [1959]). In contrast, in other contexts, particularly in the West, delays are swiftly interpreted as violations of individual rights or as signs of mismanagement. This cultural dimension should not be overlooked, as it significantly influences how consumers and citizens respond to temporal disruptions. For instance, when it comes to sensitive supply chains, particularly those involving food or pharmaceuticals, how companies and governments communicate delays—whether by alleviating uncertainty through transparent information or perpetuating bureaucratic opacity—directly influences public reactions (Yu et al., 2017). The connection between temporality and culture serves as a critical lens for understanding delay hierarchies, providing a foundation for broader reflection on the psychology of expectation and its implications for the perception of power. To synthesize the main insights, Table 1 outlines the key domains in which temporal hierarchies manifest,

identifies the actors disproportionately affected, and highlights the socio-political consequences of these delays. This typology sets the stage for a closer examination of higher education as a site where temporal asymmetries are not only reproduced but actively shaped by institutional practices and governance logics.

FIGURE 1
HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE TIME? MONOCHRONIC VS. POLYCHRONIC SOCIETIES

Societies vary significantly in their perception of time, a distinction often explored through the concepts of monochronic and polychronic time. In monochronic societies, such as the United States, Germany, and Japan, time is viewed as linear and compartmentalized. Punctuality and adherence to deadlines are highly valued, and lateness is often seen as unprofessional or disrespectful. In contrast, polychronic societies, such as those in Latin America, the Middle East, and West Africa, approach time with greater flexibility, prioritizing social interactions over rigid schedules. Commitments are frequently adjusted based on evolving priorities, and delays are generally more acceptable. In Mexico, for instance, a late start to a meeting is not necessarily a sign of inefficiency but may instead reflect the importance placed on personal relationships. These differences extend to supply chain management, where a Western company might view a delay as a contract violation, whereas an African company may see it as an expected challenge that requires adaptation and negotiation.

Source: Inspired from *Le Monde*, October 4, 1995.

TABLE 1
TYPOLOGY OF TEMPORAL HIERARCHIES: DOMAINS, ACTORS, AND THE EFFECTS OF DELAY

Domain	Illustrative example	Affected actors	Form of temporal hierarchy	Observed effects
<i>Global supply chains</i>	Unequal COVID-19 vaccine distribution	Marginalized populations (global South)	Disparities in access to vital resources due to logistical delays	Reinforcement of global health inequalities
<i>Precarious labor</i>	Migrant taxi drivers in Toronto	Migrant workers	Imposed availability	Erosion of temporal autonomy
<i>Higher education</i>	Bureaucratic delays, rigid academic calendars	Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	Temporal misalignment with student realities	Reduced access to academic resources
<i>Public transport</i>	Frequent delays in mass transit systems	Low-income and racialized populations	Dependence on external time control	Obstructed access to employment and healthcare
<i>Cultural perceptions</i>	Differing tolerance for waiting	Entire societies	Socialized temporal norms and delay perception	Varied justice views and institutional accountability
<i>Global mobility</i>	Air travel delays: business travelers vs. migrant workers	Mobile but unequally privileged individuals	Asymmetric delays by class nationality and travel purpose	Unseen social emotional injustices lost life moments

Source: The author.

CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF DELAYS

Waiting is profoundly influenced by cultural norms and societal expectations. In some cultures, delays are accepted with good grace, reflecting a broader philosophy of time as fluid and collective rather than rigid and individualistic. The concept of “temporal discipline,” introduced by Thompson (2018 [1967]), highlights how industrial societies have imposed rigid structures of punctuality, while other cultures adopt a more flexible approach to time. For instance, in many parts of Latin America, the unpredictability of daily life fosters the idea that waiting is an integral part of human interaction. On the other hand, in “*productivist*” societies such as the United States or Germany, where operational efficiency is overvalued, delays are often perceived as failures, or even personal offenses made by some individuals toward others. These contrasting perspectives stem from historical and economic structures; industrial capitalism has entrenched the idea that time is a commodity to be measured, managed, and optimized. This divergence in attitudes toward expectation can lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions (Arman & Adair, 2012), as different cultures attribute varying levels of urgency and importance to punctuality and efficiency. Shifting focus from the macro-level structural and socio-political hierarchies of delays explored previously, attention turns to the cultural and psychological dimensions shaping how delays are experienced and interpreted. Unlike institutional impositions of temporal inequalities, cultural norms and individual perceptions mediate the meaning, emotional impact, and social significance of waiting. These influences directly shape emotional responses, perceptions of fairness, and coping mechanisms.

Waiting also has a significant psychological impact, influencing emotions, perceptions of fairness, and personal well-being. The degree of control a person feels over delays has a significant impact on their response. For instance, a passenger stuck in unpredictable traffic without knowing the cause or outcome may feel helpless and anxious, while a traveler consistently receiving flight updates may perceive the wait as more emotionally manageable (Kim & Park, 2016). A sense of predictability and transparency often mitigates frustration, fostering psychological resilience even during prolonged interruptions. Understanding the psychological perception of delays is driving many industries to invest in tools that alleviate the negative emotions associated with waiting, such as real-time flow tracking systems and proactive communication strategies. These technologies are not neutral; they reflect priorities about which customers deserve timely information. Responses to delays, such as priority boarding on airlines, go beyond logistical optimization; they also reinforce social hierarchies, making waiting a visible marker of social status. Those with financial means can bypass the inconvenience, while others are reminded of their lower priority (see Figure 2). Psychological and social dynamics thus reveal that waiting is not just a passive, suffering experience, but rather an active, complex process shaped by power, control, and cultural conditioning, with profound consequences for individual and collective agency.

Within the specific context of higher education, these temporal dynamics assume critical significance. Students—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds—frequently encounter administrative and pedagogical delays as invisible yet structurally defining barriers to academic success. For instance, in France, the protracted validation process for the equivalence of foreign diplomas is a well-documented obstacle for international students; these delays, often lasting several months, prevent timely enrollment in desired courses or access to mandatory internships. Furthermore, delays in obtaining essential documents, restricted access to digital resources, and extended processing times for enrollment or scholarship applications intensify feelings of exclusion and uncertainty. What may initially appear as routine or technical time management reveals deeper tensions between theory and practice within university governance. This underscores the urgent necessity to embed temporal considerations into student support frameworks and institutional policies to advance equity and social justice. Moreover, rigid deadlines can exacerbate cognitive overload, undermining student performance and well-being—highlighting the imperative for a deliberate and critical approach to time in both pedagogical and administrative domains (Koudsia & Kirchner, 2024).

FIGURE 2
SKIPPING THE LINE: A PERK OR A PRIVILEGE?

If queuing highlights class inequalities, its absence reshapes them in new and subtle ways. The ability to bypass a queue often comes at a price, as many airlines offer priority boarding or airports provide expedited security screening for those willing to pay. Sometimes, skipping the wait is as simple as downloading an app. Starbucks' slogan "No time, no wait" for its mobile pre-ordering app exemplifies how convenience is increasingly monetized. Beyond economic disparities, technological inequalities also play a crucial role: those without access to digital tools or real-time information are excluded from these privileges. For instance, some apps allow wealthier individuals to pay others to stand in line for them, turning waiting time into a commodity. This phenomenon reflects what Dick Larson of MIT, a leading theorist of queuing, describes as the expanding reach of market logic into every aspect of daily life. As technology and capitalism intertwine, the queue—once a seemingly democratic space where everyone waits their turn—becomes another arena where financial and digital access determine one's ability to sidestep inconvenience, reinforcing social hierarchies in ways that often go unnoticed.

Source: Adapted from *Slate*, July 2, 2019.

Far from being a mere imposition, waiting can sometimes become a space for invention, where new forms of social relationships and organization emerge. In some cities, groups of patients waiting for a visa or a court hearing often form spontaneous mutual aid networks, creating unexpected social connections in the interstices of delays (Fagundes, 2017). Places such as asylum-seeker centers or food bank lines thus transform into spaces where new solidarities are forged, and subtle but effective forms of resistance take root. These dynamics remind us that, while delays can serve as instruments of domination, they can also pave the way for a reconfiguration of how individuals relate to time and to one another. Indeed, reactions to delays—whether individual or collective—reflect processes of resistance and reconstruction, where waiting periods, far from being idle pauses, become moments of action and resistance, as Scott (1985) examines in the context of peasant communities. It is in this tension between submission and innovation that one can find a key to understanding the deeper significance of delays. This insight encourages us to explore how, in certain specific contexts, control over time can give rise to more subtle but profoundly transformative forms of resistance. To crystallize these cultural and psychological insights, Table 2 synthesizes key dimensions, illustrating how norms, emotions, social status, and forms of agency interact to shape the multifaceted experience of delay.

TABLE 2
SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF TEMPORAL DISRUPTIONS

Dimensions	Illustrative examples	Consequences
<i>Psychological perception</i>	Control over delayed information (e.g., real-time updates vs. uncertainty)	Emotional well-being; resilience or frustration; delay tolerance
<i>Social status and waiting</i>	Priority boarding, paid queue-skipping, digital access disparities	Reinforcement of social hierarchies; visible markers of privilege and exclusion
<i>Institutional delays in higher education</i>	Administrative hold-ups; diploma equivalence processes; resource access	Structural barriers to success; increased exclusion and uncertainty
<i>Spaces of resistance and innovation</i>	Mutual aid networks during waiting (e.g., visa queues, food banks)	Subtle resistance to temporal domination; reconfiguration of social relations

Source: The author.

DELAYS AS A TOOL OF POWER AND CONTROL

In addition to being a manifestation of supply chain problems, delays are often used as tools of power, reinforcing existing hierarchies and restricting access to essential resources. In immigration systems, bureaucratic delays act as invisible barriers that disproportionately affect people from marginalized backgrounds, limiting their ability to move freely between countries or access protection. Prolonged asylum processing times or visa restrictions serve as implicit forms of exclusion, suggesting that mobility is a privilege rather than a fundamental right accessible to all (see the experiences of international students with study visa immigration in South Africa, as described by Lee *et al.* [2018]). Similarly, in labor relations, employers exploit delays to weaken workers' bargaining power. By prolonging negotiations or delaying wage payments and career advancements through administrative slowdowns, companies can push employees into financial desperation, compelling them to accept unfavorable conditions through their temporal power, as defined by Rosa (2010, 2013) (see Figure 3). These artificial delays demonstrate how time itself is weaponized to maintain control over individuals and groups, reinforcing socio-political disparities and limiting opportunities for advancement for the most vulnerable, who remain trapped in a cycle of persistent inequality and forced passivity.

FIGURE 3
THE POWER OF THE CLOCK: WHO CONTROLS TIME CONTROLS THE GAME

Temporal power illustrates how control over time has emerged as a key mechanism of social domination. In modern societies marked by acceleration, power is no longer rooted in material wealth or cultural capital; it increasingly hinges on the ability to set the pace for others. Those who control time—by setting deadlines, slowing down, or speeding up processes—wield a subtle yet decisive form of authority. A top manager who delays a promotion, imposes unrealistic project deadlines, or grants flexibility to select employees directly influences career trajectories. This unequal management of time creates structural disparities, enabling some to advance rapidly while others remain trapped in prolonged uncertainty. Temporal asymmetry extends beyond the workplace: it shapes access to opportunities, distribution of workloads, and even the balance between professional and personal life. Ultimately, time becomes a strategic resource, reinforcing social hierarchies and deepening the divide between those who control the tempo and those who must follow it.

Source: Inspired from Rosa (2010).

Beyond immigration and labor, deliberate delays play a crucial role in geopolitical conflicts and the control of information they entail. Governments and political actors often manipulate the timing of humanitarian aid deliveries, using them as negotiating tools or methods of coercion against opposing groups. Historically, the refusal to provide food, medicine, or relief during disasters or wars has exerted immense pressure on vulnerable populations, turning deliberate delays and shortages into geopolitical destabilization operations, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict around the Gaza Strip has demonstrated (Buheji & Hasan, 2024). These calculated delays serve not only as instruments of suffering but as extensions of foreign policy. Similarly, in the digital sphere, control over the flow of information through Internet throttling shapes public perception and limits dissent. By deciding who receives information and when, political authorities and corporations manipulate narratives, suppress protests, and maintain power. In short, deliberate delays demonstrate that waiting is not incidental; in many cases, it is a calculated strategy designed to serve the interests of those who control time, expressing a form of domination in the Sartrean sense (Lievens, 2022). These dynamics underscore how manipulation of delays is an integral part of political control, with long-lasting consequences on social structures and global relations.

Delays, as tools of power and control, ultimately reveal a profound asymmetry in the way time is not only experienced but also strategically managed. While certain stakeholders, such as governments or large

corporations, use delays to reinforce their power and influence, another dimension of the phenomenon is emerging in the contemporary digital age. As Schier (2021) underlines, the value assigned to academic time—and the increasing reliance on digital systems to “optimize” it—reflects broader structures of control within higher education. Time-saving technologies, rather than freeing academic labor, often impose new rhythms, priorities, and expectations that subtly reshape professional behavior. The manipulation of time—particularly through the algorithmic management of information flows, service access, and online interactions—is becoming a form of indirect governance, where delays no longer result from logistical malfunction but from calculated strategies designed to influence behavior and decision-making (Binns, 2022). In this new configuration, waiting operates as a form of invisible discipline, where inefficiency is feigned and delay becomes intentional. Time is weaponized to structure attention, shape preferences, and limit autonomy. This shift raises urgent ethical concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and fairness in the distribution of both resources and information. A critical reflection on the increasingly blurred boundary between technical systems and social control is essential to understanding how time, as a precious and contested resource, continues to generate and reproduce inequalities—often silently, and with minimal resistance.

Beyond the political and economic arenas, strategic management of deadlines resonates profoundly within higher and vocational education. Temporal control is especially evident in the regulation of academic careers: delays in credit validation, postponed internship placements, or diploma conferrals, and administrative sluggishness in appeal processes serve as subtle yet powerful mechanisms that reinforce inequalities among students and faculty. These temporal asymmetries, often invisible or dismissed as minor inconveniences, significantly undermine perceptions of institutional legitimacy and erode stakeholders’ trust in the education system. This phenomenon directly challenges power dynamics inherent in educational institutions, where control over time becomes a critical lever shaping individual and collective trajectories. Framed within the chronopolitics of time (Sharma, 2014), such practices reveal how institutions wield temporal authority as a tool of governance and stratification. Furthermore, in an era of expanding digitalization, algorithmic management of access to learning platforms and instructional resources raises pressing ethical concerns, particularly regarding fairness, transparency, and accountability. These considerations align closely with the imperative to critically interrogate educational practices through social theory frameworks, emphasizing practical implications for governance and management in higher education institutions. To summarize, the deliberate manipulation of time functions as a strategic tool of power across multiple domains, involving key actors and temporal strategies whose social and political effects are outlined in Table 3. The framework reveals how control over delays enforces hierarchies, limits access and sustains inequalities in contemporary institutions and societies.

TABLE 3
MECHANISMS AND OUTCOMES OF TEMPORAL CONTROL ACROSS SECTORS

Domain	Actors exercising temporal power	Deliberate temporal strategies	Social and political outcomes
<i>Immigration</i>	Governments; immigration authorities	Prolonged processing; visa delays	Mobility restriction; exclusion; legal precarity
<i>Labor and employment</i>	Public and private employers	Wage delays; slow promotional processes	Financial coercion; weakened labor rights
<i>Geopolitical conflicts</i>	States; political leaders	Delayed aid; information withholding	Population suffering; destabilization; coercion
<i>Digital governance</i>	Corporations; algorithm designers	Algorithmic throttling, managed service delays	Behavioral control; surveillance
<i>Higher education</i>	Colleges; Universities	Delays in credit validation; internship placement	Inequity; institutional power reinforcement

Source: The author.

CONCLUSION

Delays are deeply embedded in the structure of economic, political, and social systems, revealing profound inequalities and mechanisms of control. This position paper has highlighted how delays disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations, influence cultural perceptions of time, and serve as deliberate tools of power in the hands of “masters of time,” who can impose their own pace on others. By examining these dimensions, it is possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of how waiting is not simply a passive experience, but an active one, where privilege, exclusion, and domination intersect. While previous studies often treated delays as isolated inefficiencies, the position paper fills a critical gap by systematically linking delays to broader sociopolitical dynamics and power asymmetries. The theme is particularly relevant in an age of global interconnectivity, where bureaucratic slowdowns shape the daily lives of millions, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Recognizing the structural nature of delays challenges the assumption that they are merely technical inefficiencies, positioning them instead as essential elements in broader discussions about justice, mobility, power, and access to consumer society. This perspective is crucial for policymakers and businesses seeking to establish fairer trading systems that mitigate disproportionate waiting burdens and eliminate asymmetries in access to resources, services, and opportunities.

Building on the analysis presented, my contribution opens up promising research avenues for restructuring or mitigating delays. Future studies should investigate how communities adapt to chronic delays by creating informal networks and ad hoc strategies to navigate bureaucratic and supply chain barriers. Additionally, exploring the role of technology—such as predictive algorithms, automated prioritization, and real-time tracking—in either managing or exacerbating delays can shed light on the increasing manipulation of time in both physical and digital realms. Comparative research across diverse cultural, political, and economic contexts would further illuminate how delays are differently perceived, experienced, and exploited worldwide. Moreover, examining the psychological, social, and institutional factors that shape individual and collective responses to delays will deepen our understanding of their broader and long-term implications. Ultimately, framing delays as socially constructed phenomena rather than mere inconveniences opens new paths for studying resistance, agency, and resilience. This fresh perspective encourages a shift from viewing waiting as a passive process to recognizing it as an active, complex one embedded in power relations, with significant consequences for social justice and institutional change.

To extend the analysis presented here and draw meaningful implications for higher education, it is crucial to examine how temporal dynamics unfold within this distinct institutional context. Recognizing time as a mechanism of power and control enables universities to design policies and practices that mitigate the disproportionate impact of delays on vulnerable student populations. This requires the development of targeted strategies to redistribute temporal burdens equitably, ensuring that no group is unfairly disadvantaged by administrative inefficiencies or pedagogical lags. Such an approach fosters learning environments that are not only more inclusive but also more attuned to the diverse realities of the student body. However, the current study’s limited empirical scope and theoretical focus call for further research exploring specific institutional practices, longitudinal impacts, and the role of digital technologies in shaping temporal experiences in higher education. By conceptualizing waiting and delay as complex political, psychological, and economic phenomena, institutions are better positioned to support student well-being and academic achievement. The critical lens proposed urges higher education systems to actively promote social justice by addressing temporal inequalities, ensuring equitable access to institutional resources, and empowering all students to succeed. Embracing this holistic perspective is essential if universities are to meet the evolving demands of contemporary society and respond effectively to global educational challenges.

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