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RESEARCH NOTES

Putting It off until Later:
A Survey-Based Study
on Academic Procrastination
among Undergraduate Students

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RIMANDARLO A DOPO: UNO STUDIO BASATO
SU UN'INDAGINE SULLA PROCRASTINAZIONE
ACCADEMICA TRA GLI STUDENTI UNIVERSITARI

Abstract

Academic procrastination is a common issue among university students that can negatively impact their academic performance and well-being. This study investigated college students' prevalence and underlying factors of academic procrastination. One hundred respondents completed questionnaires assessing their procrastination behaviour, time management skills, confidence in academic ability, motivation, fear of failure, distractions, and productivity. The results revealed that academic procrastination was a prevalent problem, with 52% of the respondents admitting to frequently procrastinating on academic work. The findings also indicated that many students lacked confidence in completing academic tasks well, were not motivated to do academic work, and had difficulty starting academic work. Poor time management skills, fear of failure, and distractions were identified as significant contributors to academic procrastination. Interestingly, many respondents preferred more manageable academic tasks before more challenging ones and worked better under pressure and close to deadlines, suggesting the possibility of structured procrastination. The results suggest that interventions to improve time management skills, increase confidence in academic ability, reduce distractions, and set realistic goals for academic tasks may help combat academic procrastination. The

findings have implications for educators and students seeking to develop effective strategies to overcome academic procrastination and improve academic performance.

Keywords: Academic performance; Academic procrastination; Self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

Academic procrastination is an increasingly prevalent concern among undergraduate students, further exacerbated in today's digital era with the ubiquitous presence of technology and social media. These modern distractions contribute to the deferral of academic tasks, leading to stress, anxiety, and diminished academic performance. Despite the known detrimental effects of procrastination on academic success, it remains a persistent challenge for many students.

Recent studies continue to reinforce the widespread nature of academic procrastination. A comprehensive review by Kim and Seo (2015) reports that most university students across various disciplines engage in some form of academic procrastination, echoing earlier findings (Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Ferrari, 2001). These studies highlight the commonality of procrastination and its potential to impact academic achievement negatively. Moreover, academic procrastination is linked to a range of adverse outcomes. Klingsieck (2013) found a significant correlation between procrastination and lower academic performance, aligning with the observations of Chu and Choi (2005) and Steel (2007). These studies collectively suggest a substantial impact on students' academic and psychological well-being.

Understanding the underlying causes of academic procrastination is crucial for developing effective interventions. Recent research by Zacks and Hen (2018) and Day *et al.* (2014) identifies key factors contributing to procrastination, such as fear of failure, lack of motivation, and poor time management skills. High anxiety levels, especially among perfectionists, have also been linked to increased tendencies toward academic procrastination.

Addressing these underlying factors is pivotal in curbing academic procrastination. Interventions have been proposed focusing on goal setting, schedule creation, and positive self-talk. A study by Klassen *et al.* (2008) found that self-regulation strategies effectively reduce academic procrastination. These findings are consistent with earlier meta-analyses by Steel and König (2006), suggesting that interventions aiming to enhance

self-regulation and goal-setting skills could be instrumental in mitigating academic procrastination among college students.

Given the significant impact of academic procrastination on undergraduate students' academic success and overall well-being, educators and researchers must devise effective strategies to address this issue. Identifying risk factors early on and implementing tailored interventions can be crucial in preventing and reducing academic procrastination.

2. Literature review

Academic procrastination is a significant concern in higher education, affecting many undergraduate students worldwide. It leads not only to diminished academic performance but also to heightened stress and adverse mental health outcomes. This phenomenon, while longstanding (Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Steel, 2007), has garnered renewed interest due to its increasing prevalence in the digital age. The proliferation of digital distractions has exacerbated procrastination tendencies, making it a focal point of contemporary educational research (Kandemir, 2014).

Procrastination, in general, is the voluntary delay of planned actions despite being aware of potential adverse outcomes (Ellis & Knaus, 1977). In the academic context, this translates to postponing study-related tasks such as exam preparation or assignment completion (Senecal, Koestner, & Vallerand, 1995). Recent studies have expanded on this definition, showing that academic procrastination can take diverse forms, from passive delay to active engagement in unrelated activities as a form of escapism (Sirois, 2014).

The prevalence of academic procrastination is consistently high among undergraduate students. Zacks and Hen (2018) report that procrastination behaviours are shared across various academic disciplines and levels. Day *et al.* (2014) further emphasize that procrastination is not a sporadic occurrence but a regular habit for many students, often increasing in intensity throughout their university tenure. These findings are supported by broader studies indicating that procrastination is not just a personal failing but a widespread educational challenge (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007).

Academic procrastination arises from a complex interplay of individual and contextual factors. On an individual level, factors such as low self-efficacy, self-esteem, and high anxiety significantly contribute to procrastination (Ferrari, 2001). These findings are reinforced by recent neuroscientific

research suggesting that procrastination is linked to the brain's self-regulation and emotional control mechanisms (Gustavson *et al.*, 2014). Contextually, academic tasks themselves, when perceived as uninteresting or of low value, can exacerbate procrastination tendencies (Steel & König, 2006).

The implications of academic procrastination are wide-ranging and profound. Academically, it negatively correlates with overall performance and GPA (Kim & Seo, 2015). Psychologically, it contributes to heightened stress, anxiety, and risks of depression and burnout (Klingsieck, 2013). These findings are echoed in longitudinal studies that suggest a cyclical nature of procrastination, where initial procrastination leads to increased stress and further procrastination (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013).

Addressing academic procrastination through targeted interventions is vital, given its prevalence and impact. While self-regulation and time management strategies have shown promise (Steel, 2007), there is a need for more nuanced research that considers individual differences and the specific challenges of the digital age. Future research should also explore technology-based interventions, given the role of digital distractions in exacerbating procrastination (Rozgonjuk, Levine, Hall, & Gainsbury, 2020).

3. Method

The present study surveyed 99 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students aged 20-19. Participants were recruited from a university in Indonesia. The Academic Procrastination Scale Questionnaire (APSQ) was used to measure academic procrastination among the participants. The APSQ, initially developed by Solomon and Rothblum (1984), was employed in this study to assess academic procrastination. The APSQ is a well-validated self-report measure consisting of items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*), designed to capture various facets of academic procrastination behaviours and attitudes. Recent studies have continued to confirm the reliability and validity of the APSQ in diverse academic contexts (Kim & Seo, 2015; Zacks & Hen, 2018). It demonstrates high internal consistency, ensuring that it accurately measures the intended construct of procrastination (Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986). Its test-retest reliability has also been established, indicating that it consistently measures procrastination over time (Steel, 2007). In our research, the APSQ was administered to 99 EFL undergraduate students aged 19-23 from a university in Indonesia. The choice of APSQ was based on its established utility in measuring academic

procrastination, especially in culturally diverse educational settings (Klingsieck, 2013).

The survey was conducted online using GoogleForm. Participants were sent an email invitation containing the survey link and instructed to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The APSQ consisted of 14 items, and participants were asked to respond on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The data collected from the APSQ was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the prevalence and severity of academic procrastination among the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality was ensured throughout the study. The data collected in this study will be used solely for research purposes and will not be disclosed to third parties.

The scores for each item range from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of academic procrastination. The total score is obtained by summing the scores for each item, with the possible range of total scores being from 14 to 70. The total score obtained from the scale can be used to categorize procrastination levels based on the Academic Procrastination Scale (APS) developed by Steel (2010). The total score ranges from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating higher levels of academic procrastination.

The following categorization was used to identify the students' procrastination level.

Table 1. – Procrastination level categorization.

Score	Procrastination level
14-28	Low
29-42	Moderate
43-56	High
57-70	Very high

Table 1 classifies the procrastination levels based on their scores. The scores are divided into four categories: low, moderate, high, and very high. The score range of 14-28 is considered low, 29-42 is considered moderate, 43-56 is considered high, and 57-70 is considered very high. The table provides a clear and concise summary of the procrastination level for each score range. It can be used to compare the procrastination levels of different groups or to determine the percentage of participants falling into each procrastination level.

4. Result and discussions

The 100 participants in this survey comprised 12 male students and 88 female students, indicating a predominantly female sample. This gender distribution is not surprising, given that women tend to outnumber men in many academic fields, particularly in nursing, education, and social sciences. The gender distribution of the sample is consistent with national trends in higher education enrollment (*Fig. 1*).
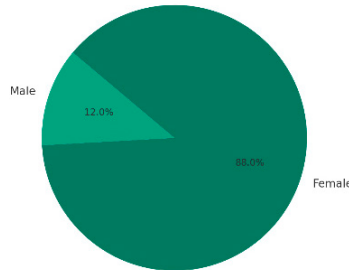
Figure 1. – Participant distribution by gender.

The sample was relatively evenly distributed in class standing, with nine first-year students, 40 sophomores, 22 juniors, and 29 seniors. This distribution suggests that the sample represents a typical undergraduate student body. It is worth noting, however, that the sample size for each class standing is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other undergraduate populations (*Fig. 2*).
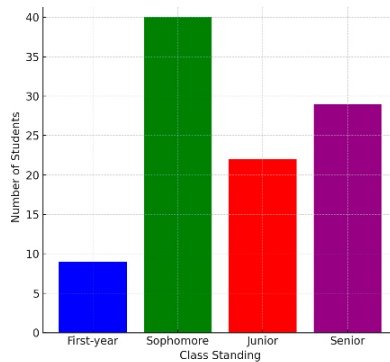
Figure 2. – Participant distribution by class standing.

The age range of the participants was 19-23, which is consistent with the typical age range for undergraduate students. The sample's relatively narrow age may limit the generalizability of the findings to older or non-traditional undergraduate students. However, focusing on a narrow age range may increase the study's internal validity by reducing the potential influence of age-related variables on the outcomes of interest.

Overall, the demographic characteristics of the survey participants suggest that the sample represents a typical undergraduate student body in terms of gender, class standing, and age range. However, the small sample size for each class standing and the narrow age range may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations of undergraduate students.

Table 2. – Students' procrastination level survey result.

Score	Procrastination level	Number of participants
14-28	Low	0
29-42	Moderate	38
43-56	High	56
57-70	Very high	6

Table 2 presents the procrastination level of undergraduate students based on their scores. The scores are divided into four categories: low, moderate, high, and very high, with corresponding ranges of 14-28, 29-42, 43-56, and 57-70, respectively.

In this study, 100 participants were surveyed using a procrastination scale to assess the extent of their procrastination tendencies. The results showed that procrastination is an expected behaviour among the participants, with 62% being categorized as either high or very high procrastinating. This finding is concerning, as procrastination has been linked to adverse outcomes such as poor academic performance and increased stress and anxiety. The study also found that a subset of individuals struggled with procrastination more than others, with 6 participants categorized as having very high procrastination. Individual differences in personality, motivation, or other factors may influence procrastination behaviour. The study results indicate that procrastination is a prevalent behaviour among the participants. Out of the 100 participants, 6 were categorized as very high procrastinating, 56 as high procrastinating, and 38 as moderate procrastinating based on their scores on the procrastination scale.

The following data presented in *Table 3* is the descriptive statistics of a survey conducted on undergraduate students to measure their level of procrastination. The survey had 100 participants, and the mean pro-

crastination score was 45.15. The standard deviation was 8.16, indicating that the procrastination scores varied from the mean by an average of 8.16 points. The maximum procrastination score was 70, indicating that some students had a very high level of procrastination. The minimum score was 29, indicating that some students had a low level of procrastination.

Table 3. – Descriptive statistic data on procrastination survey.

Descriptive statistic of survey result	
Number of partcipants	100
Means	45.15
Standard Deviation	8.16
Maximum score	70
Minimum score	29

The data presented in the questionnaires indicate that academic procrastination is a prevalent problem among the respondents. The majority of the respondents (52 out of 100) admit to often procrastinating on academic work (1). This finding is consistent with the definition of procrastination as delaying or postponing tasks despite knowing that doing so may have negative consequences (Steel, 2007). Additionally, the results show that many respondents lack confidence in completing academic tasks well (2), are not motivated to do academic work (3), and have difficulty starting academic work (4). These findings align with previous studies that suggest procrastination is often associated with negative emotions, low self-efficacy, and poor academic performance (Ferrari, Johnson, & McCown, 1995; Tice & Baumeister, 1997).

Moreover, the data indicate that time management is also an issue for many respondents (5). This data is consistent with previous research suggesting poor time management skills significantly predict academic procrastination (Tuckman, 1991). The respondents' lack of confidence in their academic ability (6) and uncertainty in completing academic work well (13) also suggest that their procrastination may stem from a fear of failure (Steel, 2007). Interestingly, the data suggest that many respondents prefer more manageable academic tasks before more difficult ones (9) and work better under pressure and close to deadlines (7). This state aligns with the notion of «structured procrastination» proposed by Perry (1996), where individuals use their tendency to procrastinate to their advantage by completing less essential tasks while postponing more critical ones. However, this approach may not be practical for everyone and may lead to further procrastination and stress.

The data also reveal that distractions when doing academic work are prevalent among many respondents (10). This finding aligns with previous research that suggests that students often engage in non-academic activities during study time, leading to lower academic achievement (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Finally, the respondents' preference for doing academic work during certain times (14) suggests that time of day may be a crucial factor in academic productivity (Sonnentag & Kruel, 2006). In conclusion, the data suggest academic procrastination is a prevalent issue among the respondents and may stem from various factors, such as fear of failure, poor time management, and distractions. The results align with previous studies that suggest procrastination is often associated with negative emotions, low self-efficacy, and poor academic performance. The findings may help educators and students develop strategies to combat academic procrastination, such as improving time management skills, reducing distractions, and increasing confidence in academic ability.

5. Conclusion

The survey has revealed that academic procrastination is a widespread problem among the surveyed students. The findings suggest that this behaviour is associated with negative emotions, low self-efficacy, poor time management, fear of failure, and distractions. To address this issue, it is recommended that educators and students develop strategies to improve time management skills, increase confidence in academic ability, reduce distractions, and set realistic goals for academic tasks. Furthermore, creating a supportive learning environment that encourages students to seek help when needed and provides them with the necessary resources to overcome procrastination may be helpful. Students should also be encouraged to self-reflect and identify their triggers for procrastination to develop effective coping mechanisms. By addressing academic procrastination, students can improve their academic performance, reduce stress and anxiety, and develop better habits for their future academic and professional endeavours.

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Riassunto

La procrastinazione accademica è un problema comune tra gli studenti universitari che può avere un impatto negativo sul loro rendimento accademico e sul loro benessere. Questo studio ha indagato la prevalenza degli studenti universitari e i fattori alla base della procrastinazione accademica. Un centinaio di intervistati hanno completato questionari valutando il loro comportamento di procrastinazione, capacità di gestione del tempo, fiducia nelle capacità accademiche, motivazione, paura di fallire, distrazioni e produttività. I risultati hanno rivelato che la procrastinazione accademica era un problema diffuso, con il 52% degli intervistati che ammetteva di procrastinare spesso il lavoro accademico. I risultati hanno anche indicato che molti studenti non avevano fiducia nel portare a termine bene i compiti accademici, non erano motivati a svolgere il lavoro accademico e avevano difficoltà a iniziare il lavoro accademico. Scarse capacità di gestione del tempo, paura di fallire e distrazioni sono state identificate come fattori che contribuiscono in modo significativo alla procrastinazione accademica. È interessante notare che molti intervistati preferivano compiti accademici più facili rispetto a quelli più impegnativi e lavoravano meglio sotto pressione e in prossimità delle scadenze, suggerendo la possibilità di una procrastinazione strutturata. I risultati suggeriscono che gli interventi per migliorare le capacità di gestione del tempo, aumentare la fiducia nelle capacità accademiche, ridurre le distrazioni e fissare obiettivi realistici per i compiti accademici possono aiutare a combattere la procrastinazione accademica. I risultati hanno implicazioni per educatori e studenti che cercano di sviluppare strategie efficaci per superare la procrastinazione accademica e migliorare il rendimento scolastico.

Parole chiave: Autoefficacia; Procrastinazione accademica; Rendimento accademico.