Academic Procrastination: Adaptive or Self-Harming Behaviour?

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Abstract

Academic Procrastination is the unremitting or intermittent postponement of educational activities. This paper focuses on different aspects of procrastination among the student population in their academics. It examines the concept of academic procrastination in students in terms of the qualitative experience of the phenomena, the subjective predisposition and preference for academic procrastination among student population, the various theories that suggest causes for procrastination, the link between procrastination and cognitive ability, link between temperament of the students and the tendency for procrastination, the adaptive and self-harming features of academic procrastination. Finally, this paper mentions conventional and non-conventional ways of coping and curbing procrastination among students in their academics. Much research is required however, to further understand the causal factors for procrastinating behaviour among students and the personal predisposing factors that make certain student populations more likely to procrastinate, to explore the adaptive aspects or positive implications, of academic procrastination, if there may be any that is.

Keywords: Academic Procrastination, Jam-packing, Motivation, Implications.

A battle often ensues between an individual’s will to do an academics related activity and his will to do something that he truly wishes to. Often the individual overcomes this conflicting situation by delaying the less subjectively desirable task and selecting to delay commencement of the less desirable tasks. Academic procrastination is one such phenomenon. The individual chooses to delay the commencement of his or her academic activities and engages in other subjectively desirable activities or tasks. These activities may come in several forms, ranging from sleeping, watching TV, playing video games, eating food and several other different activities desirable to different individuals. Academic procrastination is a widespread phenomenon and is not something that people generally are unaware of. All of us may have engaged in procrastination of academic tasks or simply procrastination of certain tasks for that matter. Students may engage in academic procrastination for specific subjects or topics, simply because they may not like the subject or topic in question or because they may be finding it difficult to cope, or simply because they are bored or for any of the several other reasons possible.

Research findings show that when we possess a mental representation of a goal mainly in relation to its process (i.e., procedure emphasis) instead of the result of the particular task, it tends to cause less procrastinating behaviour. Concentrating on the procedure of an undertaking can mitigate delaying behaviour. (Krause and Freund, 2016)

Procrastination is a behavioral propensity with conceivably harming results for the individual experiencing it. The most common indication of procrastination is under-performance: in light of their propensity to begin late, procrastinators don’t have enough time to perform at the level their abilities would permit. Further, for a few procrastinators, this causes emotional difficulties. (Dewitte and Schouwenburg, 2002)

Steel et al. (2007) depicted four fundamental sorts of procrastination. These are to be specific avoidance, arousal, fear of failure, and rebellion sorts of procrastination. Avoidance procrastination alludes to the putting off of assignments which are regarded repulsive. Individuals vary on the sorts of errands they find aversive, in any case, for a few people most difficult assignments are aversive. Such
individuals are now and then portrayed as basically being lazy. Chronic procrastinators generally tend to discover a few of life's common assignments tacky, have a tendency to be quickly exhausted and invest a greater amount of their energy in subjectively pleasant tasks. Arousal procrastination alludes to putting off errands which are not esteemed to be arousing for the person. Arousal procrastinators are the individuals who go up against excessively and make circumstances for themselves wherein they should work under pressure and concentrate on high priority undertakings. Fear of failure procrastinators are another class of procrastinators who tend to stress over getting conceivably negative assessments from others and attempt to maintain a strategic distance from those circumstances where they trust they may fall short. (Wamback and Brothen 2001)

Research has shown that students with low level of conscientiousness, wherein they are less capable of regulating themselves and are generally less disciplined, tend to delay their academic tasks more, also it was found that students in higher academic level tend to engage in delaying behaviour more and struggle to maintain their academic output. (Rabin et al., 2011)

Psychoanalytic perspective proposed that procrastination happens when there are circumstances that distress one's ego. As indicated by this hypothesis, when the ego of the individual is undermined, the evasion conduct, to be specific, procrastination, happens as an essential of self-security. Along these lines, as exceptionally worried individuals display shirking conduct all the more much of the time, it is just a characteristic result that they wind up procrastinating to a more prominent degree also. (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007)

From the behaviourist perspective, several reinforcement theorists have suggested that procrastination is increased when individuals are able to get away with postponing behaviour. When individuals begin a task and then terminate it half way, it increases their tendency to quit tasks before finishing them. Similarly we have what is known as the Temporal Motivation Theory. (Siaputra, 2010) Temporal Motivation Theory (TMT) had made an endeavour to clarify choice procedures of somebody's decision making or their conduct. TMT recommended that any individual always organizes activities which ensured the highest utility, at any rate with regards to subjective perspective of that individual for that specific time. As such, individuals for the most part procrastinated when they think the utility of doing the assignment was low. (Siaputra, 2010)

In a study, the connection between academic beliefs (which can be rational or irrational), procrastination of academic activities, and inclinations of time for exam preparation and academic success were investigated. The findings of this study had revealed that, academic beliefs which were rational by nature had a direct influence on procrastination of academic activities and studying time inclinations for exams. This outcome proposed that students with academic beliefs that are more rational by nature, experienced a lesser tendency to procrastinate in their academic tasks. On the other hand, students whose academic beliefs were less rational in nature, were more likely to postpone their academic tasks. (Balkis et al., 2013)

Temporal aspects and subjective temporal orientation of students do play a significant role in our understanding or explanation of why procrastination occurs. Study findings by Ferrari et al (1997), revealed that procrastinators may delay activities until the afternoon or night because they are more comfortable doing their academic tasks during the evening and night time. Time related features of procrastination become more renown when individuals assume the task is less rewarding, unpleasant, difficult or simply tedious and long, thereby causes increase of negative emotions towards the same. In addition the avoidance of the academic task in combination with lack of self-control paves way for stabilizing one’s present temperament by escaping the undesirable emotional feelings and the lack of desirable rewards connected to the present errands and replacing these errands with more desirable and subjectively rewarding tasks. In this manner when failure to regulate oneself in time develops into a recurrent way of reacting to tasks that are deemed as tedious or lacking quick successive rewards,
Procrastination can under this light be regarded as a steady behavioural propensity with qualities like traits. (Díaz-Morales et al., 2008)

Similarly, there is a pivotal part for stress and optimistic temperament in procrastination. Often there is a vicious circular cycle at play that involves the elements of stress and optimistic temperament. As in, the stress causes a procrastinator to procrastinate; the procrastinating behaviour of the procrastinator gives the procrastinator temporary relief or escape from the undesirable task. However, sometime later, the procrastinator feels more anxiety because now he/she has lesser time to do the difficult task that was postponed. This may cause the procrastinator to procrastinate further, thereby potentially causing complete failure to perform the task. Several research findings suggest that procrastination is connected to stress and also that, to some extent this stress may be created by oneself. (Sirois, 2014) procrastinators often find it difficult to separate themselves from negative affect and end up taking a judgemental, self-blaming approach to one’s own problems, which in turn increases their anxiety. (Sirois, 2014; Sirois & Stout, 2011; Sirois & Tosti, 2012)

Some studies have tried to investigate the adaptive aspects of procrastination. For instance study by Lay et al. (1989) came to the conclusion that those who procrastinate generally experience a higher degree of challenge and high performance immediately preceding exams. (Chun Chu and Choi, 2005) Similar studies had come to the conclusion that learners who procrastinated were more likely to jam-pack their syllabus (as in they would assemble all their study materials, but won’t study till moments preceding their exams) It was also found that crammers beat non-crammers by implementing a larger assortment of study tactics to attain maximum proficiency. A study found that shrewd students increased the productivity of their learning time to a maximum level by carefully planning out their cycle of procrastination and jam-packing. They came to the conclusion that jam-packers accomplished better on tests and experienced higher levels of what can be called as “flow” in comparison to the non-jam-packers. They also went on to suggest that jam-packing increased flow because it made the task more challenging and required a significantly stronger mental input from the learner. Sommer et al. (1990; 1993) Together, all these studies suggested that procrastination improved efficiency, challenge, and flow. (Lee, 2005)

A study revealed that educators who could help college students become more planned, chase better personal standards of accomplishment and come to be more self-determined in their motivation level, could possibly decrease student’s tendency of putting off academic tasks and enable better academic performance output from them. (Burnam et al., 2014)

It had been found that learners with higher mental capacity, procrastinated more than low mental capacity students. Procrastination is likely to increase as the learners progress in their educational line of business and became more self-regulated (Ferrari, 1991). These findings propose that procrastination has strong prevalence among college students. It also suggested that there was no negative influence of procrastination among the high achieving, successful, college learners in their academic performance. It may not be wrong to state that perhaps, procrastination in academics may be adaptive because it allows learners to sustain an optimal level of flow and make enhanced implementation of their learning phase. (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007)

It is indeed very difficult to come to a clear cut single answer as to whether procrastination of academic tasks or academic procrastination is beneficial or harmful to students in general. As can be seen there are significant research studies that are validating the beneficial aspects of procrastinating behaviour and other studies that validate the negative impacts of procrastination on students’ academic life. Some students often argue that they can work best when there is maximum academic pressure and often accomplish their academic tasks in the last moment, while others may end up not being able to complete the task and give up on it entirely as pressure increases. (Wamback and Brothen, 2001)

The level of motivation students have towards their academic aspects was found to be connected to their tendency to engage in putting off doing academic tasks. (Kandemir, 2014) Students
can increase their level of motivation in their academics, by developing their own methods to learn their subjects and therefore can reduce their overall tendency of delaying academic work. (Cahill, 2013) Organizations are much of the time swinging to social internet applications, with an end goal to frame bonds with customers. Be that as it may, little research has tended to the effect of social Internet utilization on the person. Two investigations of regular social Internet consumers (i.e. Facebook users and socially connected online gamers) inspected the impacts of incited utilization reduction or discontinuance upon users. In the two investigations, users profited overall amid the reduction/cessation period, revealing increased life fulfillment and diminished procrastination. (Hinsch and Sheldon, 2013)

Various factors may contribute to procrastination of one’s academic tasks. These factors may range from mild anxiety to full-fledged aversion, fear or complete uncertainty about one’s academic expectations or goals. Also several combination of personality factors such as impulsivity, lack of self-regulation etc can also contribute to procrastinating behaviour. (Klingsieck et al 2013)

Several studies have shown that students frequently suffered because of chronic procrastination for several reasons. To begin with, procrastination prompted underperformance or diminished academic performance. (Ferrari, Johnson, and McCown, 1995; Tice and Baumeister, 1997). Second, students who engaged in procrastination, experienced less anxiety early in the semester, however more anxiety later and more anxiety generally (Tice and Baumeister, 1997). Procrastinators were additionally observed to be more on edge or anxious all through the whole semester (Rothblum and Solomon 1984) and more agitated before a test (Lay and Schouwenburg, 1993) in comparison with students who did not procrastinate. Third, study results showed significant negative correlations between self-reported procrastination and health. In this way procrastination hampers academic achievement, as well as disables the general improvement of college students. That is, procrastination diminishes the quality and amount of learning while at the same time expanding the seriousness of stress, tension, and wellbeing related issues and diminishing monetary prosperity. (Klingsieck et al 2013)

Hence there is a strong need for curbing academic procrastination among students on whom procrastination can serve as an impediment to academic excellence or career growth. A study result showed that student’s tendency to put off things is because of their inability to keep a check on their own emotional urges and desires in the particular moment. (Grunschel et al., 2013) A study showed that putting off doing academic preparation initially in the academic year has a bad effect on overall GPA after eight months. (Jackson et al., 2003) In order to address this issue of delaying behaviour in academics among the students, it is necessary for us to look into some of the intervention strategies or techniques to help deal with the issue of procrastination. The academic environment of students often puts forth several unique subjective challenges that can add to student’s procrastination for academic tasks, like one’s academic beliefs, expectancies, student’s overestimation of time required for completion of their specific academic tasks. Some useful strategies to counter Academic procrastination can be by the implementation of planned goal setting, splitting assignments down, and altering one’s core mental beliefs or expectation of oneself with regards to meticulousness and/or doubts of failure or success. Procrastination can be better kept in check by implementing a multi-layered strategic approach, because obviously academic procrastination is not merely a shortfall in study habits or time management, but instead including a multifaceted interactional web system of behavioural, cognitive and affective components. (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984) Another important intervention strategy is to help students to gain an insight regarding their own cycles of procrastination that is to enable them to identify their causal antecedents and the secondary gains. Such insight and self-regulation can be instilled upon the students with the help of learning assistance professionals and study skills instructors.
A personality directive training structure can be an effective way to deal with the four classes of impulsive task preference choices (pleasure, Result, capability, Opposition) that lead a person to engage in delaying behaviours. It allows the individual to understand the personality pattern and deal with it to manage the delaying behaviour. (Sims, 2014)

A study depicted that skills in regulation of one’s emotions and delaying behaviour were connected and also that these connections are facilitated by the capacity to bear aversive feelings. The study also implied that the ability to modify aversive feelings decreased the consequent delaying behaviour and also that delaying behaviour in turn influenced the subsequent ability to tolerate aversive feelings. It was also found that regular training of the emotion regulation skills bear and change aversive emotional feelings and reduced delaying behaviours. Therefore, to mitigate putting off behaviour, emotion-targeted plans could be useful. (Eckert et al., 2016)

In order to reduce stress in our day to day life, mindful living is encouraged. Living mindfully,aids us to manage anxieties and stressful situations in our life efficiently and to be at harmony with ourselves and our environments. When we live mindfully, we are essentiallyexperiencingour life'severly passing instant, thereby allowing us to become more aware of ourselves. It is the act of devoting full thoughtfulness into anything at the given period of time. We submerge ourselves entirely into the particular moments.(Sathiyaseelan A &Sathiyaseelan B, 2014)Mindfulness is useful in dealing with the problem of academic procrastination, because, in the process of mindfulness, the individual consciously analyses his or her present emotions and feelings, and becomes aware of their antecedent subconscious aversive emotions (to the particular academic tasks) whichs is what causes them to engage in the delaying behaviours of their academic work in the first place. Mindfulness enables individuals to deal with and come face to face with theseantecedent aversive emotions (that cause these delaying behaviours) in a non-judgemental manner, i.e. they do not get swayed by negative emotions associated with the task at hand, and are able to overcome that shortcoming, thereby facilitating them to work on their tasks then and there, instead of putting them off for a later time.

References


Cover letter

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Sir/ma’am

We wish to submit a conceptual paper entitled “Academic Procrastination: Adaptive or self-harming behavior?” by Ganesh Nair and Anuradha Sathiyaseelan for consideration for publication in The International Journal of Research Publication’s, ‘Research Journal of Social Science and Management’. Academic Procrastination is a long known behavioral phenomenon, however it has captured researchers’ mainstream interest only since the past few decades. It is a behavioral phenomenon or practice common among students of all age groups alike. It entails delaying the commencement of academic tasks or exam preparation to complete avoidance of the academic activities.

In this manuscript, we highlight the various kinds of procrastinating behaviors such as chronic procrastination, fear of failure procrastination, arousal procrastination, avoidance procrastination and fear of failure procrastination among students. Empirical evidence regarding the impact of Procrastination behaviour among students in their academics has been reviewed, suggesting that there are consequences in various domains of procrastinators’ lives including physical health, mental health and academics. However, few studies have also suggested Procrastinating behaviour as an adaptive mechanism among specific student populaces. This manuscript also emphasizes the implications of such research findings with regard to spreading awareness and counteracting the harmful effects of academic procrastination for student through training and intervention programs in colleges.

There is a current scarcity in available research on this behaviour due to its recent development, thus this conceptual paper adds to existing literature on academic procrastination, serving as a base for future studies on the same. By examining academic procrastination as a self-defeating behaviour or adaptive behaviour among students, this paper has application potential in Applied Social Psychology, with regard to various stakeholders including students, colleges and the Education system. For this reason, we believe that this manuscript is appropriate for publication by Research Journal of Social Science and Management and is in keeping with the aim of the journal to advance the body of knowledge about the psychology. This area of research is at the intersection of psychology and effects of procrastination in students’ education and learning.

In addition, we would like to declare that this research work is original. This manuscript has not been published and is not under consideration for publication in any other journal or edited book.
Finally, there are no conflicts of interest to disclose by the authors with regard to the submitted manuscript.

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Thank you for your consideration of this manuscript.

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