

# Impact of Academic Procrastination on Academic Performance

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**Abstract:** Procrastination has been an area of concern for all human beings. We all have experienced procrastination and faced its consequences. Procrastination in the modern world is delaying the task or postponing it to another day. Many a times, we have looked for solutions to not procrastinate. This review paper focusses on understanding different perspectives on procrastination and academic procrastination. It focusses on various theories and meanings explaining the construct of procrastination. It further explains the reasons of academic procrastination and its impact on academic performance. It also highlights how different variables influence academic procrastination and academic performance.

**Keywords:** Academic Procrastination, Academic Performance, Procrastination.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is delaying the task at hand to another time. We all have faced this challenge at one point in our life. The delay is present despite awareness that it might lead to difficulty or challenges later. It can range from delaying everyday activities to salient tasks. It stems from fear of failure, dysfunctional beliefs, lack of interest in task or in general, lack of time, motivation, focus and proper planning. Procrastination has been an important and interesting area of research. There have been considerable amount of researches to understand the very nature and components of procrastination. Various researches focus on understanding how it is related to motivation, performance, self-esteem, etc. The current review study aims to understand the impact of procrastination on academic performance among students. There have been inconsistent results in the past researches.

Milgram (1992) accentuated that procrastination is essentially a modern day problem, and it happens in countries where technology is advanced. The ancient Egyptians provided 2 meanings of the word procrastinate. One is the useful habit of avoiding unnecessary task and impulsive effort and the other is the harmful habit of laziness in finishing a necessary task. The term procrastination comes from Latin verb “procrastinare”, meaning to put off until tomorrow. (De Simone 1993). Pro means forward motion and “crastinus” means belonging to tomorrow. Romans use this term when it’s best to wait for the enemy to be out and display patience in terms of military conflict. It is a deferred judgement which was considered necessary and wise. Bliss (1983), in his book indicates procrastination with laziness and indifference. Lakein (1973) and Sherman (1981) emphasize on the self-defeating aspects of the behaviours of procrastinators.

Milgram (1991) focussed on 4 components of procrastination:

1. A behaviour sequence of postponement
2. Resulting in a substandard behavioural product
3. Involving a task that is perceived by the procrastinator as being important to perform
4. Resulting in a state of emotional upset

Procrastination is considered as a method of self-handicapping and may be used as an excuse to avoid ego-dystonic cognitions (Ferrari, 1991).

Snyder et al (1998) said people engage in variety of excuses to negotiate a more pleasant outcome for their behaviours. Procrastination is an excuse for poor performance.

Silver et al (1981) argued that all procrastination is self-defeating.

Burka and Yuen (1983) also focus on irrational nature of procrastination.

Ferrari (1994) argued that procrastination may be self-defeating but it can also be in one's own interest and logical. He also gave two types of procrastination: Functional and dysfunctional.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In psychology, different theories have different explanation of behaviour of procrastination:

### **Psychoanalytic theories:**

The notions of Sigmund Freud regarding procrastination indicate that tasks are avoided because they are threatening to the ego. The role of anxiety in avoidance behaviour was best explicated by Freud in the monograph *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1953). The challenge was to empirically test it.

Blat et al (1967) tested a group of high or low procrastinators. The two groups were compared on a number of variables. No significant differences were found between groups on the: Cumulative grade point average, vocabulary or information subtest scale scores of the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale, areas of academic major, number of extra-curricular activities or total scores from Scholastic Aptitude Test. However, significant differences were found on measures relating to perception of time. The students who procrastinated had a lower score on the picture arrangement subtests of Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale, suggesting a diminished ability to anticipate future events. In projective tests, the students who procrastinated were found to be telling significantly more person oriented narratives than the punctual ones. Also, a significant indication was that the stories of procrastinators had more themes concerning death. Results indicate that chronic lateness is related to an unconscious fear of death.

### **Psychodynamic theories:**

They believed procrastination is related to childhood experiences and traumas and how it shapes cognitive processes of adults. Missildine (1964) gave chronic procrastination syndrome and believed it is caused by faulty childrearing practices. He stated that parents of procrastinating adults over coerced achievement. They set unrealistic goals and link parental love and approval to achievement of goals. Later in life, when demands are put on the adult to prove his worth, they tend to avoid the tasks as they don't want to face disappointment.

Macintyre also believed that faulty childrearing can result in procrastinating adults. He believed 2 parental extremes exist: too permissive or too stern resulting in procrastinating adults. These are the ones which were discovered by Lay (1987), Mc Cown et al (1989) and Ferrari et al (1993).

Spock in his writings explained people find themselves chronically unable to finish a task because it reminds them of early childhood conflicts between themselves and their parents. They became procrastinators without any insight.

The challenge remains that these concepts are difficult to operationalize.

Mc Cown et al (1991), who found that adult children of alcoholics were more likely to report high procrastination scores than other college students.

Ferrari et al (1984) found that women's procrastination scores were significantly related to their father's authoritarian parenting style. Such women also reported indecisive mothers and suppressed anger. Procrastination is used as a passive aggressive behavior strategy to cope with family environment.

### **Behaviorism theories:**

Procrastination represents a form of escape or avoidance conditioning. The challenge is that it doesn't explain individual differences in procrastinating behavior. Some people procrastinate much of the time and others don't.

**Cognitive and Cognitive Behavioral theories of Procrastination:**

Knaus & Ellis (1977) stated that procrastination is related to irrational fears and self-criticism. Failures are bound to happen because standards are too high. The avoidance of the task involves becomes a convenient excuse to avoid the failure. Research reports procrastination is related to irrational dysfunctional beliefs (Pychyl et al 2012) core beliefs and negative automatic thoughts for eg. Perfectionism.

**Motivational Theories:**

Theories of motivation explain the choice to postpone tasks and assignments along with its ability to explain decision making process. Steel and Konig (2006) proposed a general model of motivation: Temporal motivation theory (TMT). This model is derived from vroom's expectancy theory (1964), hyperbolic discounting (Ainslie & Haslam, 1992), cumulative prospect theory (Tverky & Kahneman, 1992) and need theory (Dollard & Miller, 1950). This was used as a motivational approach to understand procrastination by Steel in 2012. TMT explains that a person will procrastinate a task depending on:

1. Expectation of achieving a desirable outcome
2. Value of the outcome
3. Timing of that outcome
4. Sensitivity to delay gratification

It is collectively known as procrastination equation.

**Self-Efficacy Theory:**

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability of the person to perform a task. The concept of self-efficacy was given by Bandura, a belief in one's ability to produce desired outcomes through their own actions. The phenomenon of procrastination is explained through the concept of self-efficacy. If the self-efficacy is low, the tendency to procrastinate increases (Judge et al 2001). Lack of self – efficacy and downward spirals also maintain procrastination.

**Academic Procrastination:**

It refers to the usage of procrastination concept in academic and educational settings. It is postponement of assignments, assigned activity or task at school, preparing for exams, studying for a test etc. in a given time.

Rothblum (1986) said it is occasional or continuous delay in educational tasks.

Gross & Ackerman (2005) said it is a failure to do task in a given frame of time.

It is a maladaptive behaviour of intentional postponement of tasks & assignments that impacts the learning and achievement needs of students at all levels (Steel, 2007).

Schraw et. al (2007) said deliberate delay of work to be completed.

Dryden (2012) said it is found in areas like doing homework, studying for exams, attending meetings etc. The negative consequences include associated stress, guilt, unable to meet commitments, social rejection, and dissatisfaction, lack of productivity. (Ferrari et al 2004).

**Causes of Students to indulge in academic procrastination:**

The main reasons of student who involve in academic procrastination are given below:

1. **Dysfunctional Beliefs:** Students irrational beliefs about their ability to complete a task can hinder and result in procrastination. One of the belief of students is that they perform better under immense pressure and hence they procrastinate.
2. **Poor Time Management:** Students inability to judge the time taken to complete a task can result in procrastination. There is a mismatch in planning and execution of the tasks. If the tasks or assignments are planned properly and well executed, it increases the effectiveness. However, students high on procrastination are unable to manage their time well.
3. **Lack of Sincerity:** Students who procrastinate lack the focus and dedication that is required to complete the task. This further impacts the effectiveness of the results obtained.

4. Fear of Failure: Students who fear failure due to the pressure of family or friends or teachers procrastinate and lose the ability to even perform up to their potential.
5. Lack of Motivation: The students sometimes lack the motivation to the task. Their urge to perform the task is so low that it results in procrastination. Their achievement motivation is poor.
6. Lack of Interest in the Assigned Task: Students are expected to study a lot of subjects which may or may not be of their interest. Students procrastinate because the task is boring and feel it is of no use.
7. Defying Authority: Procrastination is a type of passive aggressive behavior toward authority having a negative impact on learning.

Various procrastination measures are available focusing on it as a functional or dysfunctional behavior and a behavior or a trait: PASS: Procrastination Assessment Scale – Students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), Decisional Procrastination Scale (DP, Mann, 1982), The Tuckman Procrastination Scale (TPS; Tuckman, 1991), Academic Procrastination State Inventory (APSI; Schouwenburg, 1995), Lay's General Procrastination Scale (1986), Aitken's Procrastination Inventory (1982)

### **Academic Performance:**

Educational institutes measure the students regularly through tests and semester/annual term papers. This is referred to as academic performance or academic achievement. It is a measure of the academic knowledge and skills of the person. It is basically how well the students have mastered in a subject or course. It is also the ability as to how long the person is able to remember and write it down at the time of the exam. Academic performance is priority for educators. There are many factors other than educational institute that impact the academic performance. The factors could be interpersonal, intrapersonal, community based, peer pressure, societal norms etc. There are various measures of academic performance measurement i.e. Grade Point Average, Percentage scores, Test scores etc.

### **Academic Procrastination & Academic Performance:**

There has been significant amount of research to understand academic procrastination and academic performance. Some found significant negative correlation and others didn't. Many researches along with performance studied self – esteem, social media usage, motivation, stress tolerance etc. One of the early researches by Baumeister & Scher (1988) stated that procrastination was a self-indulgent behaviour which affected the performance negatively because one ended up with less time to work. In another study it was found that procrastination was a strong predictor of performance. (Ariely and Steel et al. 2001). Another interesting phenomenon was meeting deadlines while studying procrastination. A study Wertenbroch (2002) examined that deadlines control the procrastination behavior but not improve task performance.

Lakshminarayan et al. (2013) found a negative relationship between procrastination and performance, the results indicated that students with above average and average academic performance had lower scores of procrastination and vice versa, that students who showed high procrastination scores performed below average in their academics. Balasubramanian et al (2012) found that procrastination had a significant negative impact on the academic performance of the college students. Lili Sandhora Mohd kasim (2015) academic procrastination was significantly negatively correlated with academic performance. Balkis et al (2017) procrastination has a negative impact on self-esteem by interrupting academic performance.

Smitha Dev (2018) found a marked negative correlation from the variable of Procrastination Behavior with Stress Tolerance, study habits, and academic achievement among students studying in India & UAE.

Kim and Seo (2015) conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that procrastination and academic performance had an adverse relationship. They found that there are multiple factors that impact the results of studies on academic procrastination and academic performance: Measures of reporting performance indicators, Measures of procrastination indicators, age of the sample, culture. The performance indicators differ when the data is self – reported and externally assessed. Generally, self-reported data is mistaken (Rosentain, 2009). Age and demographics of the sample of students is another important dimension supporting previous studies: younger people have been found to procrastinate more than older adults. (Erde et el 2003). The study also revealed that Choi and Moran Scale if used for measuring procrastination indicated a positive relationship between procrastination and performance as against others. Choi and Moran's Scale (2009) is based on the concept that procrastination is adaptive.

Jill Janssen (2015) study did not find a significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic achievement, as measured by grade point average.

### 3. CONCLUSION

It is important to understand how procrastination is defined as it can change the procedure of the study. It is binding to consider it as an undesirable habit instead of the older definitions among the student population. Many scales used in studies are self-report questionnaires which sometime depict a different picture than reality – so the measures for studies must be carefully considered. This review study focusses on researches which indicating how procrastination impacts the academic performance. Procrastination has been an area of concern that many people present as part of symptoms to other comorbid conditions in a clinical setting. Cognitive behaviour therapy has been an effective treatment for procrastination as it focusses on the present and is solution focused. Various techniques of behaviour therapy and cognitive therapy are combined to be used based on the needs of the client. Some of those interventions include: Mindfulness training, activity scheduling, cognitive restructuring, behavioural shaping techniques, functional analysis, chaining, token economy etc. The idea is to help the person believe in themselves, manage the environment and be able to model success. Various other tips to manage procrastination are: to start the task even if it is for few minutes in a day and doing the difficult task early in the day.

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