

Gender Differences and Prevalence of Academic Procrastination among High-School Students

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Abstract: Procrastination is a relatively modern phenomenon which refers to the act of delaying or deferring some important work till a later date. This behavioral tendency of postponing activities affects life in general in its various aspects such as decision making, doing daily activities in time and maintaining punctuality. It often leads to emotional upset as well. However, procrastination does not always lead to inefficiency or substandard outcomes as many people need intense levels of stimulation to keep them motivated enough to perform well. So, procrastination has both positive and negative aspects. Academic procrastination is simply procrastination on academic tasks or the act of postponing academic activities as exhibited by students in academic settings, for instance, delaying the completion of home assignments, studying for examinations, attending school activities or even doing academic administrative tasks. It involves a gap or discrepancy between students' intentions and their actual behaviors. A wide variety of reasons for academic procrastination have been identified. This paper attempts to find out whether gender of high-school students is related to the prevalence of academic procrastination in them. The researcher uses a questionnaire for the study and also uses appropriate statistical methods to analyze and interpret the data obtained from the study.

Index Terms: Procrastination, academic procrastination, high-school students, and gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is purely a modern phenomenon. It is a multi-dimensional construct as it includes behavioral, affective and cognitive components (Ferrari et al., 1995, Solomon and Rothblum, 1984) and hence, it has been defined in a wide variety of ways. Etymologically speaking, the word 'procrastination' originates from the Latin words 'pro' meaning 'forward, forth, or in favor of' and 'crastinus' meaning 'of tomorrow'. So, procrastination refers to the act of deferring or delaying some work till a later date. A broad and systematic definition given by Milgram (1991) emphasized four components of procrastination as – "(1) a behavior sequence of postponement, (2) resulting in a substandard behavioral product, (3) involving a task that is perceived by the procrastinator as being important and (4) resulting in a state of emotional upset."

However, there is enough evidence to support the fact that procrastination does not always lead to inefficiency or substandard outcomes. It is often a deliberate strategy for persons who require intense levels of stimulation in order to be adequately motivated. Such persons work extremely well under pressure and perform quite well. So, essentially procrastination has both positive and negative aspects.

Academic procrastination is simply procrastination on academic tasks or the act of postponing academic activities as exhibited by students in academic settings, for instance, delaying the completion of home assignments, studying for examinations, attending school activities or even doing academic administrative tasks. From the cognitive point of view, academic procrastination involves a gap or discrepancy between students' intentions and their actual behaviors.

Generally, academic procrastinators overestimate the time left to complete tasks or underestimate the time required to finish the tasks at hand. According to Schouwenburg (1995), procrastination is the result of three behavioral manifestations: (a) lack of promptness, either in intention or in behavior, (b) intention-behavior discrepancy and (c) preference for competing activities.

A wide variety of reasons for academic procrastination have been identified. It may be related to the nature of the task at hand, to the personality traits of the student concerned or to some other demographic factors. Among the various correlates of academic procrastination, the most significant ones are: Fear of failure, Task aversiveness, Timing of rewards and punishments, Irrational beliefs, Low self-efficacy and low self-esteem, Impulsiveness, Sensation-seeking attitude, Poor organization skills, Poor time management, Intention-action gap, Achievement motivation, Age and Gender. Whatever be the reason and extent of academic procrastination, it almost always produces negative outcomes, such as, high levels of stress and anxiety, lower academic grades, low levels of self-esteem and even poorer health.

Time and again, researches have revealed that procrastination is one of the most dangerous threats to academic performance of the students at any academic level – high school, undergraduate or graduate. The rates of academic procrastination may vary in different levels, but it is definitely prevalent.

II. METHODOLOGY

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the present study attempts are –

1. To investigate the extent to which academic procrastination is prevalent among high-school students, and
2. To find out specifically whether gender differences are associated academic procrastination in any way.

Sample

The study was carried out with a total of 112 students (58=male, 54=female) enrolled in class IX of two schools of Kolkata.

Tools

A three-part questionnaire was used to collect data. The first part of the questionnaire was prepared mainly to gather primary information about the students, i.e., their age, gender, etc. The second part was a 5-point Likert type rating scale including 27 items. These items were statements to find out students' ways of doing various academic tasks. The third and last part of the questionnaire had 15 items, assessing the prevalence of academic procrastination in five different types of academic activities such as studying at home, studying for examinations, completing class assignments and projects, attending classes and returning library books. Each area contained three items rated on 5-point Likert type scales to assess the frequency of procrastination on the tasks, the degree to which it caused a problem for them and how intently they wanted to decrease their tendency of procrastinating.

III. FINDINGS*Objective 1:*

For each student, responses to each of the 27 items in the second part of the questionnaire were scored (a=1, e=5) and summed up. Median split was used to determine procrastinators and non-procrastinators, that is, students scoring below the median were taken to be non-procrastinators and students scoring above the median were taken to be procrastinators. The median score of 77 differentiated between the procrastinators and the non-procrastinators. Table 1 shows the different groups:

Table 1

Groups	Procrastinators (scores above median value 77)	Non-procrastinators (scores below median value 77)	Total
Male	24 (41.37%)	34 (58.62%)	58
Female	30 (55.55%)	24 (44.44%)	54
Total	54 (48.21%)	58 (51.78%)	112

Responses to the third part of the questionnaire show that out of all the students, 89% somewhat procrastinated on studying at home and experienced problems because of the delay, 93% and 80% students nearly always or somewhat procrastinated on studying for examinations and on finishing class assignments and projects, respectively and therefore experienced problems. However, when it came to attending classes only 39% students always or nearly always procrastinated. Also, in case of returning library books on time, just 30% students always or nearly always procrastinated.

Objective 2:

On comparing the responses of male and female students, the following results were found:

Table 2

Areas of Procrastination	% of male procrastinators	% of female procrastinators
Studying at home	86	92
Studying for examinations	92	93
Finishing class assignments and projects	72	89
Attending classes	34	44
Returning library books	26	34

IV. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent of academic procrastination among high-school students as well as to examine the relationship between gender differences and levels of academic procrastination, that is, whether rates of academic procrastination differed between male and female students. Results showed that academic procrastination was highly prevalent among high-school students (corresponding to Objective 1). Academic procrastination levels were very high in the tasks of studying at home, studying for examinations and finishing class assignments and projects, whereas it was quite low in case of attending classes and returning library books. Again findings also revealed that girls procrastinated much more than boys in all the academic tasks taken into consideration for this study, thereby supporting the view that there is a relationship between gender differences and levels of academic procrastination among high-school students (corresponding to Objective 2).

V. CONCLUSION

It must be admitted that the present study has its limitations as the data has been collected from schools, selected as per the convenience of the teacher from a relatively small sample of students. Thus, further studies and researches with larger populations

and with more diverse demographical and psychological variables might yield more accurate results about and deeper insight into the phenomenon of academic procrastination.

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