

A Study of Procrastinatory Behaviour and Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students in South Western Nigeria

Bayode Isaiah Popoola

*Faculty of Education, Educational Foundations and Counselling,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria
E-mail: bayodep@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Procrastination; academic procrastination; procrastinatory behaviour; college performance

ABSTRACT The study investigated the relationship between academic procrastination and academic performance of university students in a Nigerian university. Subjects consisted of 185 final-year education students (Male = 98, Female = 87) of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. One research instrument, the Procrastination Scale (PS), developed and validated by Lay (1986), was used to collect data for the study. Data on subjects' academic performance using their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CCPA) were also collected from their departments. Results from Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis and one-way Analysis of Variance indicate that subjects' academic performance had significant inverse relationship with procrastination. The results also showed that there was a significant difference between the academic performance of low and moderate procrastinators with low procrastinators performing better than moderate procrastinators. The study brings into focus the need for Nigerian counsellors to recognize procrastination as a behavioural problem which requires professional counselling intervention

INTRODUCTION

The lives of university students are characterized by frequent deadlines given by university teachers and administrators to carry out various responsibilities such as registration for courses, completion of course forms and submission of class assignments or term papers. Many students are in the habit of putting off these responsibilities until the last minute, a practice referred to in research literature as procrastination. A common form of academic procrastination among students is waiting until the last minute to turn in papers or to study for an examination (Milgram et al., 1993).

Ellis and Knaus (2002) defined procrastination as "the desire to avoid an activity, the promise to get to it later, and the use of excuse making to justify the delay and avoid blame". Silver and Sabini (1981) described the procrastinator as "...someone who knows what he wants to do in some sense, can do it, is trying to do it, yet doesn't do it".

Procrastination is regarded as a dispositional trait which has cognitive, behavioural and emotional components. According to Solomon and Rothblum (1984), people tend to avoid tasks which they find unpleasant and engage in activities which are more rewarding, especially with short term over long term gain (McCown et

al., 1991). Ferrari and Emmons (1995) found that procrastinators have low self esteem and delay task completion because they believe they lack the ability to achieve task success. An individual postpones doing things that make him or her anxious, apprehensive, or likely to lose face in the presence of peers (Milgram et al., 1992).

Effert and Ferrari (1989) have demonstrated that procrastinators often lack self-efficacy, self-esteem and are publicly self-conscious and highly self-critical. They often have perfectionist expectations and are over-conscientious. They display irrational fear of success or failure which may lead to neurotic avoidance. They may also be emotionally overwhelmed and anxious. They have less need for cognitive complexity and are more likely to attribute success to external and unstable factors (Rothblum and Solomon, 1986).

Research findings on the proportion of students who procrastinate have not been consistent. For instance, while Solomon and Rothblum (1984) estimated that at least half of all students consistently and problematically procrastinate, Ellis and Knaus (1977) found that the number of students who procrastinate at some point approaches 95%. As reviewed by Ferrari and Beck (1998), approximately 70% of US college students engage in frequent procrastination and this occurs regardless of race or gender.

There is no doubt that procrastination can have particularly serious consequences for university students. For instance, Tice and Baumeister (1997) found that procrastinators received significantly lower paper and examination grades than non-procrastinators. On a larger scale, procrastination could lead to total failure. Though there is some evidence in research literature that procrastination is associated with poor academic performance (Wesley, 1994; Beck et al., 2000; Tuckman et al., 2002), the nature and strength of this association is not yet ascertained. This study therefore sought to ascertain the relationship between procrastination and academic performance of university students. The following hypotheses were postulated:

- (1) There is no significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic performance of university undergraduates.
- (2) There is no significant difference in the academic performance of university undergraduates who are low, moderate and high procrastinators.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects for the study consisted of 185 final-year education students (Male = 98, Female = 87) selected from a class of students offering a compulsory education course in the Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The students, who were asked to volunteer their class time to complete the research instrument, were not necessarily randomly selected.

One research instrument, the Procrastination Scale (PS), developed and validated by Lay (1986), was used to collect data for the study. The scale is a 20-item self-report instrument of the Likert type. It consists of items intended to find out the extent to which subjects procrastinate on issues that cover various aspects of life. The original author of the instrument had found it to possess high internal consistency and convincing construct validity. A high score on the scale indicates a high level of procrastination while a low score is indicative of a low level of procrastination. After the administration of the instrument,

data on subjects' academic performance using their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CCPA) were collected from their departments.

RESULTS

The major hypothesis for the study stipulates that there is no significant relationship between procrastination and academic performance of university undergraduates. To test this hypothesis, data collected from the administration of the Procrastination Scale were correlated with subjects' cumulative GPA using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the correlation between procrastination and students' CGPA is -0.50, which is significant at 0.05 probability level. This implies that there is a significant inverse relationship between procrastination and students' academic performance. In other words, the students' academic performance tends to diminish as their levels of procrastination increased. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic performance of university undergraduates is rejected.

To test the second hypothesis which stipulates that there is no significant difference in the academic performance of university undergraduates who are low, moderate and high procrastinators, subjects were classified as low, moderate and high procrastinators on the basis of their scores on the Procrastination Scale. Thereafter, data on their academic performance were subjected to One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to ascertain the influence of level of procrastination on their academic performance. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 indicate an F-ratio of 36.05, which is significant at the 0.05 probability level. This suggests that subjects' level of procrastination has a significant influence on their academic performance. Therefore, the hypothesis which stipulates there is no signi-

Table 1: Correlation between procrastination and academic performance

| Variable | N | \bar{X} | SD | r | P |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| Procrastination | 185 | 52.68 | 15.28 | | |
| CGPA | 185 | 2.59 | 0.75 | -0.50* | <0.05 |

*Significant, $P < 0.05$

Table 2: Influence of level of procrastination on academic performance

| Source of Variance | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | P |
|--------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------|
| Between Groups | 29.14 | 2 | 14.57 | 36.06* | < 0.05 |
| Within Groups | 73.54 | 182 | 0.4 | | |
| Total | 102.68 | 184 | | | |

*Significant, P < 0.05

ificant difference in the academic performance of university undergraduates who are low, moderate and high procrastinators is rejected.

A further attempt was made to ascertain which group of procrastinators had superior academic records over the others. To this end, data on the academic performance of subjects in the three levels of procrastination were subjected to a post-hoc multiple comparison test using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) formula. The results are presented in Table 3

From the data in Table 3, low procrastinators had a mean CGPA of 3.25 and a standard deviation of 0.47 while moderate procrastinators had a mean CGPA of 2.42 and a standard deviation of 0.71. The difference between the mean values of the two groups (0.83) is statistically significant at 0.05 level. This result suggests that there is a significant difference between the academic performance of low and moderate procrastinators with low procrastinators performing better than moderate procrastinators.

Also, data on the CGPA of low procrastinators (\bar{x} = 3.25, SD = 0.47) were compared with those of high procrastinators (\bar{x} = 2.29, SD = 0.65). The analysis yielded a mean difference of 0.96, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This result shows that the academic performance of low procrastinators as measured by their CGPA were statistically better than those of high procrastinators (P < 0.05). However, another comparison of the mean CCPA of moderate

(\bar{x} = 2.42, SD = 0.71) and high procrastinators (\bar{x} = 2.29, SD = 0.65) as shown in Table 3 produced a mean difference of 0.13, which is not significant at 0.05 probability level. This also suggests that the academic performances of moderate and high procrastinators are not statistically different even though moderate procrastinators recorded a slightly higher CGPA than high procrastinators.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown that procrastination has a significant inverse relationship with students' academic performance. This tends to confirm the view that procrastination might have serious consequences for academic performance. In this study students who reported strong tendencies to procrastinate also tended to have lower GPAs and vice-versa. This tends to support earlier findings by Steel, Brothen and Wambach (2001) which indicate that procrastination did not only have negative consequences on academic performance but that it could serve as an excellent predictor of academic performance. Hartman (2001) agreed with this opinion but added that successful academic performance was six times more likely for students who did not self-report as being procrastinator than for procrastinating students.

There are a number of reasons why procrastination might hamper students' academic performance. Ferrari and Emmons (1993) believed that procrastinators might not do well

Table 3: Multiple comparisons of CGPA of students with different levels of procrastination

| Levels of Procrastination | N | Mean | SD | Mean Difference | Standard Error | P |
|---------------------------|----|------|------|-----------------|----------------|-------|
| Low Procrastinator | 48 | 3.25 | 0.47 | 0.83* | 0.118 | <0.05 |
| Moderate Procrastinator | 72 | 2.42 | 0.71 | | | |
| Low Procrastinator | 48 | 3.25 | 0.47 | 0.96* | 0.121 | <0.05 |
| High Procrastinator | 65 | 2.29 | 0.65 | | | |
| Moderate Procrastinator | 72 | 2.42 | 0.71 | 0.13 | 0.109 | >0.05 |
| High Procrastinator | 65 | 2.29 | 0.65 | | | |

*Significant, P < 0.05

academically because of their low self-esteem. They usually delay task completion because they believe they lack the ability to achieve task success (Ferrari and Emmons, 1995). According to Tuckman (1991), procrastinators tend to describe themselves as people who doubt their capabilities.

The negative effect of procrastination on academic performance can also be explained in terms of the low-level of achievement motivation characteristic of most procrastinators. Procrastinators might be ambivalent about achievement itself, especially if the task is associated with a rite of passage like a dissertation or examination. They might exhibit some measure of anxiety and emotional disturbance capable of jeopardizing their chances of academic success.

CONCLUSION

This study has brought into focus the need for Nigerian counsellors to recognize procrastination as a behavioural problem which requires professional counselling intervention. Students must be made to realize the need to change their procrastinatory behaviours in order to succeed in their academic endeavours. Milgram (1993) suggested three levels of guidance for students. First, there must be intervention workshops set up for all students to aid them in recognizing procrastination. Secondly, there must be secondary interventions for at risk students and finally there must be counselling provided for students who may damage their academic career due to procrastination.

REFERENCES

- Beck, B.L., S. R. Koons and D. L. Migram. 2000. "Correlates and consequences of behavioural procrastination: The effects of academic procrastination, self-consciousness, self-esteem, and self-handicapping." *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 15: 3 - 13.
- Effert, B.R., and J. R. Ferrari. 1989. "Decisional procrastination, examining personality correlates." *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 4: 151-156.
- Ellis, A. and W. J. Knaus. 1977. *Overcoming Procrastination*. New York: Institute for Rational Living.
- Ellis, A. and W. J. Knaus 2002. *Overcoming Procrastination*. New York: New American Library.
- Ferrari, J.R. and R. A. Emmons. 1995. "Methods of procrastination and their relation to self-control and self-reinforcement: An exploratory study." *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 10: 135 - 142.
- Ferrari, J.R. and B. L. Beck. 1998. "Affective responses before and after fraudulent excuses by academic procrastinators." *Education*, 118 (4): 529 - 538.
- Hartman, J.A. 2001. "ATFY-R: Psychometric properties and predictive value for academic performance in online learning." *Doctoral Dissertation*, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL. available at <http://bama.ua.edu/~jhartman/abstract.pdf>
- Lay, C. 1986. "At last, my research article on procrastination." *Journal of Research in Personality*, 20: 474 - 495.
- McCown, W., D. Carise and J. Johnson. 1991. "Trait procrastination in self-described adult children of excessive drinkers: An exploratory study." *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, 6: 147 - 151.
- Milgram, N., B. Batori and D. Mowrer. 1993. "Correlates of academic procrastination." *Journal of School Psychology*, 31: 487 - 500.
- Milgram, N.A., W. Dangour and A. Raviv. 1992. "Situational and personal determinants of academic procrastination." *Journal of General Psychology*, 119: 123 - 133.
- Rothblum, F.D., L. J. Solomon and J. Murakami. 1986. "Affective, cognitive and behavioural differences between high and low procrastinators." *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 33: 387 - 394.
- Silver, M. and J. Sabini. 1981. "Procrastinating". *Journal of Theory of Social Behavior*, 11: 201 - 221
- Solomon, L.J. and E. B. Rothblum. 1984. "Academic procrastination: Frequency and cognitive behavioural correlates." *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 31: 503 - 509.
- Steel, P., T. Brothen and C. Wambach. 2001. "Procrastination and personality, performance and mood." *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30 (1): 95 - 106.
- Tice, D.M., and R. F. Baumeister. 1997. "Longitudinal study of procrastination, performance, stress, and health: The costs and benefits of dawdling." *Psychological Science*, 18: 454-458.
- Tuckman, B. 1991. "The development and concurrent validity of the procrastination scale." *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 51: 473 - 480.
- Tuckman, B.W., D. A. Abry and D. R. Smith. 2002. *Learning and Motivation Strategies: Your Guide to Success*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Wesley, J. 1994. "Effects of ability, high school achievement and procrastinatory behaviour on college performance." *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 54: 404 - 408.