

## **Procrastination's Relation with Fear of Failure, Competence Expectancy and Intrinsic Motivation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present challenging social and economic development requires the young generation to be competitive. As such procrastination is seen as a problem that has adverse effects on them. Thus, this research aimed to look at procrastination in students. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 126 students for data collection. Data were then analyzed with t-test to see the difference between the variables in relation to gender and ethnicity. Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between the variables. Results from the t-test showed no significant differences in all variables among subjects of different gender. However, for ethnicity t-test showed a significant difference in competence expectancy, intrinsic motivation, and fear of failure. Meanwhile there were significant negative correlations between procrastination and competence expectancy and intrinsic motivation. Also, there was a positive significant correlation between procrastination and fear of failure. In conclusion, findings showed that procrastination could be mainly related to fear of failure which can be lessened by their competence expectancy and their intrinsic motivation.

**Keywords:** Procrastination, students, fear of failure, competence expectancy, intrinsic motivation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Procrastination is extremely prevalent and is widespread in the general population (Steel, 2007). Virtually all of us dallied with dallying. Several studies have linked procrastination to individual's performance, with procrastinator performing poorly overall (Steel *et al.*, 2001) and also to individual's well being, with the procrastinator being more miserable in the long term (Lay and Schouwenburg, 1993). Procrastination has also been labeled as a troubling and dangerous phenomenon (Steel, 2007).

Procrastination is also common among students (Brownlow, 2000). According to Solomon and Rothblum (1984) as many as 50% of college students procrastinate on academic

tasks at least half of the time and additional 38% report procrastinating occasionally. This behavior is also prevalent among graduate students. The absolute amount of procrastination is considerable, with students reporting that it typically occupies one third of their daily activities, often enacted through sleeping, playing or watching TV (Pychyl *et al.*, 2002). However between 55% and 60% of the students do want to decrease their procrastination behavior on task (Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Procrastination is the purposeful delay of the start or completion of a task (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984). Procrastination is even considered to be an irrational delay of behavior towards an intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off caused by the delay.

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Procrastination is considered a disease and it is considered to be chronic or dysfunctional when such a behavior disrupts everyday functioning by impinging on ability to work (McCown and Johnson, 1991). Consequently, procrastination may result in psychological and physical discomfort.

In academic settings, Rothblum *et al.* (1986) defined procrastination as the tendency to always or nearly always putting off academic tasks and always or nearly always experiencing problematic anxiety associated with procrastination. Academic procrastination can be understood as knowing that one is supposed to and perhaps even wanting to complete an academic task but failing to perform the activity within the expected or desired time frame (Senecal *et al.*, 1995). This procrastination may contribute to missing or late assignments, anxiety during examinations and overall poor performance on tests and activities assigned for a course. Procrastination also affects the academic performance of students in terms of classroom learning and participation in activities, submission of their assignments, preparing for the examination and achievement (Hussain and Sultan, 2010).

Academic procrastination has been found to be associated with negative academic outcomes such as passing deadlines for submitting assignments, low course grades and course withdrawal. It has been identified as a substantial hindrance to academic success (Scher and Osterman, 2003). It also contributes to overall poor performance on tests and activities assigned for a course, giving up studying especially when more attractive alternatives are available (Lay and Schouwenberg, 1993).

There are many reasons associated with why students procrastinate (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984). Most reasons were related to fear of failure in relation to performance anxiety, perfectionism and lack of self confidence. However there are findings which show that fear of failure and procrastination behavior are not related (Schouwenberg, 1992), where fear of failure as a trait do not correlate with procrastination trait. Nevertheless fear of

failure in combination with some task aversion seems to be one of the principal reasons for procrastination. In other words fear of failure can lead to task avoidance particularly if the task involved is a heavy cognitive demand and is subject to evaluation. From this, it seems that procrastination is very contextual.

Motivational factors have also been found to contribute to the problem of academic procrastination. Senecal *et al.* (1995) have suggested that academic procrastination is a motivational problem whereby procrastinators are difficult to motivate and are likely to put off doing assignments and studying for exams until at the last minute (Tuckman, 1998). This suggests that the way students regulate their behavior can have a strong effect on academic outcomes. Self regulation concerns the way individual make use of internal and external cues to determine when to initiate, to maintain and to terminate their goal directed action. According to Rakes and Dun (2010) as intrinsic motivation to learn and effort regulation decreases procrastination increases.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self determination distinguished four main types of motivation that exist along a self determined continuum. In this theory they distinguished between intrinsic motivation in which an individual engaged in an activity for its own sake and for the sheer pleasure it brings or because of interest. This is in contrast to extrinsic motivation which is instrumental in nature and is performed as a means to an end. They further classified extrinsic motivation into two types, namely, self determined extrinsic motivation and non self determined extrinsic motivation. Other type of motivation is characterized by the absence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Researches have suggested that procrastination is an outcome that may be associated with self regulation styles in academic domain. Self regulation can have a powerful effect on academic outcomes such as persistence, performance learning and affect (Senecal *et al.*, 1995; Vallerand *et al.*, 1992).

In the present study, the relationship between motivational beliefs (intrinsic motivation and competence expectancy) and the students'

level of procrastination was examined. It was expected that procrastination would be negatively correlated with the two motivational beliefs. The relationship between the students' procrastination and fear of failure was also measured based on context. Incidentally there should be a negative relation between fear of failure and procrastination level. Furthermore differences in studied variables between different gender and ethnic groups were explored.

### METHODS

Subjects were 126 students from an institute of higher education. Participation in the study was voluntary. Of the participants 67.5% are female. Most of the participants, 84% were from the second and third year students. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 46 years old. The subjects were made up of 82 Malays and 44 non Malays.

Participants were administered with a set of questionnaires to measure procrastination. Procrastination items were adapted from Tuckman (1991) procrastination scale TPS35 consisting of 35 items using 5 point Likert type response format which was modified from very true of me (5) to not very true of me (1). Examples of the items are "I needlessly delay finishing jobs even when they are important" and "I postpone starting things I don't like to do". The reliability of the scale was 0.75 in this sample.

Fear of failure measures was adapted from Elliot and Church's (1997) performance-avoidance goal scale to measure fear of failure based on context specific factors. Here fear of failure relates to the psychology course the students attended. This scale consists of 6 items which was rated based on 5 point Likert scale. Reliability of the scale was 0.74.

Competence expectancy was assessed by two items adapted also from Elliot and Church (1997). The items were "I expected to do well in this class" and "I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class". Participants responded to the items based on 5 point Likert type scale from strongly agree (5), to strongly

disagree (1). Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.91.

Finally intrinsic motivation was measured using an 8 item scale adapted also from Elliot and Church (1997). Item on the scale include: "I think the course is interesting" and "I think this course is fun". Response to the item is based on a 5 point Likert type response from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Reliability of the scale for this study is .95.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationships between the variables are presented in Table 1. As expected, procrastination was significantly and negatively related to intrinsic motivation and competence expectancy. However the relationship between procrastination and fear of failure showed a positive significant relationship.

TABLE 1  
Intercorrelations of procrastination with  
intrinsic motivation, competence expectancy  
and fear of failure (N = 126)

	PRO	IM	CE	FF
PRO	-			
IM	-0.223*	-		
CE	-0.273*	0.465*	-	
FF	0.374*	-0.031	-0.045	-

\*p < 0.05

Note: PRO = procrastination; IM = intrinsic motivation;  
CE = competence expectancy  
FF = fear of failure.

Thus the present study showed that students who were motivated intrinsically reported low procrastination tendencies. These results are consistent with Senecal *et al.* (1995) who suggested that students who had intrinsic reasons for pursuing their studies are less likely to procrastinate. This is because the students involved and engaged in the activity for its own sake or for the pleasure derived from the experience not as a means to an end. Also it shows that students would not likely to procrastinate if they are interested genuinely in the course material.

Another reason why students with high intrinsic motivation procrastinate less may be because of the relationship between intrinsic motivation and mastery goals. Researches from achievement goal literature showed that there is a positive relationship between mastery goals and intrinsic motivation (Duda and Nicholls, 1992; Miller *et al.*, 1993). Mastery goals seem likely to prompt the perusal of interesting material to enhance performance whereby those with mastery orientation tend to focus on improving their level of activity, becoming proficient with materials or skills or trying to thoroughly understand new information and skills. Thus they will less procrastinate in order to attain all the new information and skills.

Competence expectancy also had a negative relationship with procrastination. Competence expectancy refers to the belief of students that they could attain competence in an achievement situation and thus would orient towards the possibility of success and adopt approach achievement goals (mastery and performance approach) (Elliot and Church, 1997). This competence expectancy indirectly relates to the self efficacy of the students whereby it describes students' belief about whether they are capable of successfully accomplishing a task, activity or assignment. Thus if students perceived that they have high competence expectancy, they would also have high regards of themselves as being able to successfully do a task which will lead them not to procrastinate since they tend to engage themselves readily in their academic tasks. This also relates to self regulation and motivational drives as suggested by Rakes and Dun (2010).

Findings from the research also showed that procrastination had a positive significant relation with fear of failure. This means that when subjects experience high fear of failure it will influence their tendency to procrastinate. This finding is congruent with that of Solomon and Rothblum's (1984). They found that fear of failure is one of the primary reasons for students to procrastinate. In this research the

fear of failure was related to the course which was considered as context specific. Students will tend to procrastinate in doing the academic tasks when they know that they are being evaluated on. This is so because they fear for the evaluation and thus they try to prolong starting or finishing the tasks.

Analyses in this study have also shown that there were no significant differences in procrastination, intrinsic motivation, competence expectancy and fear of failure between gender. It seems that procrastination occurs equally in males and females. The same is true for intrinsic motivation, competence expectancy and fear of failure. This finding could be because all the subjects were exposed to the same conditions, thus there was no significant difference between genders. As for ethnic groups, it was found that there is significant difference in terms of intrinsic motivation ( $t = 2.659$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), competence expectancy ( $t = 4.077$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and fear of failure ( $t = 2.029$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The mean calculated shows that for all the three variables except for procrastination, the Malays showed a higher mean score than the non Malays. This could be attributed to the difference in culture and upbringing between the two ethnicities.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion results of the present study indicate that intrinsic motivation and competence expectancy are associated negatively with procrastination. Thus it is important for students to be self motivated and have a high regards for their competence which can lessen their tendencies to procrastinate. Results from the study also suggest that fear of failure in context situation will tend to increase procrastination behavior. Thus to avoid the situation of fear of failure students may try to avoid the situation in which they are to be evaluated. For this reason teachers and educators can be advised to provide students with learning environment in which comparison and competition among students should not be too obvious.

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