ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION AND LOCUS OF CONTROL IN GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Procrastination is a common phenomenon among students. Even though they are aware that this is doing harm to their academic achievement, they do not quit procrastination easily. Many variables have been linked to procrastination by researchers. Personality traits are seen as a possible influence on procrastination too. There is no previous research conducted in this area in Albania.

The purpose of this study is to examine academic procrastination and its possible correlation to the personality trait of locus of control. Participants (N=45) were the students attending graduate programs at the Department of Education and the Department of Albanian Literature, at the University of Vlora Ismail Qemali. Tow scales, one on procrastination and another one on locus of control were administrated to the students. PASW was used to analyze the data collected. Results show positive correlation between locus of control and academic procrastination. Further research need to be done in order to explore the role of locus of control on procrastination. There are many aspects of personality that can influence the way people make and enact decisions, that need to be measured in other studies.

***Keywords*:** *procrastination, locus of control*

Introduction

We all know the saying "Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today". We all have delayed and postponed things telling ourselves "I am going to finish it later, for sure". Though being aware that we lose a lot by procrastinating, it's not always easy to control this kind of behavior. Procrastinating is a well known phenomenon in psychology, and it has been broadly studied on two areas: academic procrastination and neurotic indecision. (Milgram, Sroloff & Rosenbaum 1988). The former, which is on the focus of this research, refers to delay and postponement of completing assignments and preparing for examinations. (Ely & Hampton, 1973; Haycock, McCarthy,& Skay, 1998).

According to Klein, procrastination derives from latin, where pro means "forward, forth, or in favor of," and crastinus "of tomorrow" (as cited by Steel, 2007, p 66). Procrastination is defined as an irrational delay of behavior, where one delays beginning and/or completing tasks, intentionally postpones things though knowing that nothing good comes from it (Steel, 2007). According to Ellis and Knaus, (2002) procrastination is related to the desire of avoiding a task, the promise of dealing with it later, and the finding of excuses for procrastinating, in order to avoid sense of guilt. Popola (2005) says that procrastination as a concept includes cognitive, behavioral and emotional components. Meanwhile, Noran (2000) sees procrastination as the avoidance of something that a person has to do. Instead of working on a project and getting it done before deadlines, one prefers socializing with friends or relatives. Instead of studying for exams, one prefers watching something on TV or going at the cinema. The procrastinator knows exactly what he should be doing, he is capable of doing it, he is trying to do it, and yet he can't get it done. He wastes time engaging himself on activities that are less important or more entertaining than the job he has to do. It may be that the procrastinator does not evaluate and organize time in a rationale way (Noran 2000).

Different research studies focus on the level of academic procrastination among students. Ellis & Knaus (1977) found that 70% of students procrastinate regularly, while Solomon & Rothblum (1984) found that 50% of students who procrastinate do it at least half of the time. According to O'Brien 80-90% of students procrastinate (as cited by Steel, p. 65) and Day et al. estimated that 50% of students procrastinate consistently and problematically (as cited by Steel, p. 65). In general people are aware that procrastinating is wrong and harmful to them, and according to O'Brien 95% of procrastinators wish to reduce it (as cited by Steel, p. 65). Procrastinating has negative effects on students. High levels of academic procrastination among students is related to low academic achievements (Beck, Koons & Migram, 2000)

Why do people procrastinate?

Studies have associated procrastination with different variables, such as low self-esteem, inability to complete a task, time management difficulties, difficulties in postponing gratification (Ferrari & Emmons 1995; Ferrari & Emmons 1994; Effert & Ferrari, 1989), high levels of anxiety and fear related to failure (Popoola, 2005), low self efficacy, high levels of self-conscouiousness, self critics and perfectionism (Effert & Ferrari, 1989; Noran 2000), and diffitulties in selfregulation (Lee 2005; Senecal et al 1995).

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) associated procrastination with irrational fear of success or failure, which, according to them, leads to neurotic avoidance of the situation. Procrastinators are easily distracted emotionally, they are anxious, don't prefer cognitive complexity in tasks,

and tend to make external, unstable attribution (Solomon & Rothblum 1984). Other studies associate procrastination with personality traits. Steel (2007) explains that procrastination has a certain cross-temporal and situational stability. Milgram and Tenne (2000) studied personality traits related to task avoidant procrastination, and found that specifically the personality trait of locus of control affects how much a person procrastinates.

Locus of control

The concept of locus of control has been introduced by Rotter in his social learning theory (Woolfolk, 2012). The expectancy value theory is the foundation of locus of control. According to this theory an individual's engagement in a behavior is determined by what he expects from the behavior and the value his expectations have. Locus of control includes two parts: external locus of control, and internal locus of control. People who have internal locus of control tend to believe that their success or failure is up to their skills, abilities and efforts. On the other hand, people who have external locus of control tend to see their success/failure as a result of uncontrollable, external factors such as good/bad luck, chance, etc (Woolfok, 2011). Academic locus of control has more or less the same structure as the overall locus of control. People attribute their academic achievements or failures to external or internal factors.

Research show that students tend to have an internal locus of control when it comes to academic achievements, and they tend to have an external locus of control when they face failure or lack of achievements (Garden et. al. 2004; Ferrari et.al. 1992). Also, research have associated academic achievements with locus of control. Students who have high levels of internal locus of control have also a better academic performance than students who have high levels of external locus of control (Judge et.al 2001; Ferrari et.al. 1992). Students who have internal locus of control are aware that their academic success depend on their intense work and the efforts they put in. They pay attention to every piece of information that could help them get closer to their academic goals. They plan and manage time wisely. Jansen & Carton (1999) stress that students who have internal locus of control don't engage often in procrastination, and they complete their tasks earlier than students with external locus of control. In addition Beck et al (2000) found that students with internal locus of control showed less academic procrastination than students with external locus of control.

The purpose of this study is to examine academic procrastination among graduate students in the University of Vlora, and its possible relation to the personality trait of locus of control.

Hypothesis: external locus of control will correlate with high levels of academic procrastination, and internal locus of control will correlate with low levels of academic procrastination.

Hypothesis 0: there is no correlation between locus of control and academic procrastination.

Methodology

Participants

Initially 50 graduate students from the University of Vlora participated in the study. Because of incomplete returned questionnaires 5 cases were excluded from the final data

analysis. 45 participants are included in the final data analysis (43 female and 2 male). They are graduate students at the Faculty of Human Sciences, 13 students from the Department of Education and 32 students from the Department of Albanian Language and Literature. Non probability, convenience sampling is employed. The age of participants ranges from 21 to 30 years old.

Materials

This study employed two questionnaires; Procrastination Scale-For Student Populations (Lay, 1986) and Academic Locus of Control Scale (Trice, 1985). Participants completed both scales.

Procrastination Scale-For Student Populations is a twenty items Likert scale. Participants respond to items on a 5-point scale (1, uncharacteristic – 5, characteristic) whereby higher scores indicate higher procrastination. Chronbach's alpha for the scale was .72.

Academic Locus of Control Scale is a twenty eight items scale designed to asses academic locus of control (internal or external) among students. Higher scores in the scale indicate external locus of control. Questions require a "true" or "false" response. After translating the questionnaire in Albanian, we considered excluding the eighth statement because it didn't fit with the Albanian academic context. Thus the questionnaire employed in the current study includes twenty seven statements. Chronbach's alpha for the scale was .71.

Both scales used in the study were downloaded from websites that provided them for free, with authors' permission, for research purpose in the university contexts.
After being translated, the two scales were piloted on six students. According to students' suggestions, a few final changes were made to the scales before administering them.

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered to students in classrooms, before the classes began, with instructors' permission. Participants were briefly informed about the purpose of the study and data use. They were also informed on their right to confidentiality and anonymity, and to retrieve from the study if they wanted to.
The questionnaire completion required about 20 minutes.
PASW was used for data analysis.

Results

Twenty percent (20%) of the respondents reported low levels of academic procrastination, whereby 33.3 % of them reported internal locus of control and 66.7% of them reported a medium level of locus of control. None of the respondents who reported low levels of academic procrastination reported external locus of control. Seventy one percent (71%) of the respondents reported moderate levels of academic procrastination, whereby 21.9% of them reported internal locus of control, 75% of them reported the locus of control to be between external and internal, while only one student (3.1%) reported external locus of control. Few students reported high levels of academic procrastination (8.9%). One of them reported internal

locus of control, two of them reported locus of control between internal and external, and one student reported external locus of control.

The Spearman correlation test was applied to test the hypothesis. Prior data analysis showed that we did not have e normal data distribution. Thus, a nonparametric test was applied. Result showed that locus of control was statistically significant and moderately and positively correlated with procrastination ($r_s = .306$, $p < .041$). Hence, hypothesis was supported.

Discussion

Result from the current research suggest a significant and positive correlation between academic locus of control and academic procrastination. These findings are supported by previous research. Milgram & Tenne (2000) found that people with external locus of control are more likely to procrastinate than those with internal locus of control. People with external locus of control tend to believe that their success does not depend on how much effort they put on a assignment. Thus they tend to postpone serious efforts and engagement for later.

According to the current study, correlation between the two variables is moderate to low. This may be due to different limitations of the study. There could be internal validity issues with the survey, or the population may not adequately be represented by the sample in the study. The number of participants was limited, and there was only one sample employed in the study. Comparisons between different groups like, men and women, graduate and undergraduate students, might shed light to different findings. Other variables that might affect procrastination need to be tested on future research.

Few participants in the study reported high levels of academic procrastination. This is inconsistent with previous research that suggest that academic procrastination is a common phenomena among students. It may be that academic procrastination is more common among undergraduate students than among graduate students, whereas only graduate students participated in the current study. Ferrari (2000) found that a considerable number of undergraduate students showed high levels of academic procrastination (75-90%). This might be another path to go on future research.

Research show that academic procrastination is related to the process of learning. Students with high intrinsic motivation are less engaged in academic procrastination, and successful students are more likely to have internal locus of control. Future research should examine the relationship between motivation, academic success and academic procrastination.

Finally, we should add that in order to make generalizations on student population a large and representative sample should be employed on future research.

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