# Role of Motivation in Academic Procrastination

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**Abstract**

Academic procrastination involves delaying an academic task mainly due to lack of motivation. The present study attempts to explore the motivational differences in high and low academic procrastinators. 400 college students were given PASS, out of which 100 high and 100 low procrastinators were selected and given the AMS. An independent samples t-test was conducted. Results indicate that lack of intrinsic academic motivation may increase the probability of academic procrastination. The group discussion analysis revealed that certain other factors may also be responsible for lowering the motivation level of a person in academics and thereby increasing the academic procrastination level.

**Key words:** academic motivation, academic procrastination, amotivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation.

## 1 Introduction

Procrastination has been defined as "letting the low-priority tasks get in the way of high-priority ones". Most people put off working on unpleasant or tedious tasks from time to time. Washing the car, taking out garbage, cleaning windows, or making stressful phone calls are some of the examples. In fact, it is difficult to think of individuals who never procrastinate. In technical terms procrastination is postponing, delaying or putting off a task or a decision. It means to voluntarily delay an intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay.

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) did extensive research on procrastination and its correlates. They defined it as "the act of needlessly delaying tasks to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort". According to Milgram (1991) procrastination is primarily: 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 to perform; and 4) resulting in a state of emotional upset.

Procrastination essentially represents an intimate part of our human nature as its effect is vast, ranging from employees to self- employed, household to workplace, academics to non-academics etc. On the academic front, the constant pressures of grades and other evaluations, compels a student to put off writing papers and studying for exams, only to cram for days when time is finally running out. Also, students have limited time and lots of things to do such as preparing for exams, preparing presentations and assignments, administrative affairs related to school and duty of attendance etc. Such activities are postponed till the deadline approaches.

In 2007, an estimate of procrastination amongst college students was 75% with 50% of them reporting that they procrastinate consistently and consider it a problem (Burka & Yuen, 2008). Thus, academic procrastination means delaying academic tasks and trouble experienced because of this delay. Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami (1986) defined academic procrastination as "the tendency to (a) always or nearly always put off academic tasks and (b) always or nearly always experience problematic anxiety associated with this procrastination. Piers Steel extensively studied procrastination and implicated that strong and consistent predictors of procrastination were task aversiveness, task delay, self efficacy, impulsiveness as well as conscientiousness and its facets of self control, distractibility, organization and achievement motivation (Steel, 2007). There is also evidence indicating that procrastination results in detrimental academic performance, including poor grades and course withdrawal. (Semb, Glick & Spencer, 1979).

Today, procrastination is a more common phenomenon among students than ever because technology has given them the platform to explore virtual global world where they have lots of thing to do in limited time. Academic procrastination includes delaying of academic tasks such as submitting assignments, making projects, depositing fee etc. Such activities are postponed till the deadline approaches. Solomon and Rothblum (1984) have described academic procrastination as postponing primary academic tasks such as preparing for exams, preparing term papers, administrative affairs related to school and duty of attendance. In consideration of these descriptions, academic procrastination means delaying academic tasks and trouble experienced because of this delay. According to Yong (2010), academic procrastination is an irrational tendency to delay at the beginning or completion of an academic task. Many tertiary students intend to complete their academic tasks within the time frame, but they lack the motivation to get started. Due to their self-defeating behavior, academic procrastinators often experience dire consequences, including low self-esteem, depression, and academic failure.

Academic procrastination is regarded as a dispositional trait that can have particularly serious consequences for students, whose lives are characterized by frequent

deadlines. Ellis and Knaus (2002) regard it as an "interactive dysfunctional and behavior avoidance process," characterized by 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. It is often reinforced by success after last minute cramming, thus strengthening the belief in this approach as a viable strategy. Ferrari (1992 & 2000) maintained that academic procrastinators fail to attain academic goals due to task avoidance and fear of failure. Research has consistently demonstrated that procrastination is one of the biggest threats to academic performance of the students ay each academic level. Such behavior has been reported to be negatively related to test performance (Moon & Illingworth, 2005). Thus a student's academic performance has inverse relationship with procrastination (Popoola, 2005) and leads to lower grades in performances with deadlines (Tuckman, 2002).

Recent research has been attempting to explore the personal and environmental factors contributing to academic procrastination because such behavior disrupts normal everyday functioning and impinges on one's ability to study, grow and progress in academic field. There are many factors that seem to contribute to the delaying habit particularly in students. Their interest (Ackerman, 2005), locus of control (Janneson & Carton, 1999), task aversiveness (Ferrari, Keane, Wolfe & Beck, 1998), personality traits (Schouwenburg &Lay, 1995), anxiety (Solomon &Rothblum, 1984), evaluation threat (Bui, 2007) etc may all be responsible for procrastination in academic settings. The reasons which students give for their delaying habit suggest that procrastination may be prevalent in certain situations and not in others like, students may delay academic activities but not other tasks. This hints towards a probable correlation between his motivation level in academics and procrastination.

Motivation is of particular interest to educational psychologists because of the crucial role it plays in student's academic learning. Academic motivation is a student's desire (as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest) regarding academic subjects when the student's competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence. Academic motivation is a subtype of the general construct of effectance motivation, which is defined as the "need" to be successful or effective in dealing with ones environment. In Self-Determination Theory given by Deci & Ryan, (1985) a distinction has been made between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. Intrinsic motivation refers to the act of doing an activity for itself, and the pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation. Extrinsic motivation pertains to a wide variety of behaviors which are engaged in not for their own sake but as a means to an end such as doing an act for a reward or recognition. Apart from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985a) claim that a third construct, amotivation, must be considered to fully understand human behavior. Individuals are amotivated when they do not perceive contingencies between outcomes and their own actions. They perceive their behavior as caused by forces out of their own control.

The present day education system make the students strive for multiple goals in limited time resources. Such a scenario leads to motivational conflicts. Students are confronted with a bundle of attractive activities they might want to get engaged in. A study by Fries et al. (2005) showed that adolescents quite often reported conflicts between school and leisure activities, between different school tasks, and, even more frequently, between different leisure activities. If students are confronted with a motivational conflict between a learning task and a leisure activity they have two options. They can decide for the leisure alternative and postpone learning. In this case, learning time will probably be reduced and the quality of academic outcomes will suffer. Or they stick to their learning goal and turn the leisure option down. In this situation, there is evidence that students experience motivational interference during learning. Whatsoever the case, motivational conflicts will have a negative impact on academic work and may lead to procrastination habit in the students.

Researches have found an inverse relationship between academic procratination and academic motivation level in some contexts. It is to say that students who are high on academic procratination seem to have a lower academic motivation level or student's low academic motivation level makes them delay the tasks related to their academic field. That is, as motivation level decreases, tendency for procrastination increases (Balkis, 2006; Lekich, 2006; Rakes & Dunn, 2010). According to Tuckman & Sexton (1992) and Diaz-Morales et al. (2008), procrastination arises from lack of motivation. In his another research, Tuckman (1998) asserted that it is hard to motivate an individual who exhibits procrastination but he was successful in doing so by using tests as an incentive to motivate procrastinators to study. The conceptualization of academic motivation being internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic) has been well indicated by Christopher (1998). In his research note he postulated that students whose motivation is external are more likely to procrastinate and intrinsically motivated students procrastinate less and procrastination is associated with poor academic performance and negative student attitudes. Also, it has been shown that students with intrinsic reasons for pursuing academic tasks procrastinated less than those with less autonomous reasons and students who were amotivated or helpless in the regulation of their academic behavior were likely to procrastinate more (Senecal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995).

Similar results have been reported in a recent study by Katz et al (2013) that lack of autonomous motivation results in procrastination and to reduce procrastination, students must be supported to adopt a more autonomous type of motivation. Moreover, high procrastination was associated with lack of self-determined motivation and amotivation and intrinsic motivation showed significant unique effect on procrastination (Lee, 2005). A comparison of active and

passive procrastination in relation to academic motivation indicated that high identification and low external regulation increased active procrastination; low intrinsic and high external regulation increased passive procrastination (Seo, 2013).

Although all the above researches have stressed the relationship of intrinsic motivation and low procrastination, Reasinger and Brownlow (1996) have demonstrated that lack of extrinsic motivation can also predict procrastination. While extrinsic motivators are always present in a student's environment these might not be significant enough to serve as motivators particularly when students are not intrinsically motivated towards their academic work. Moreover, procrastinators may have minimized the role of extrinsic motivators such as competition or evaluation pressures in their environment.

Thus the reviewed researches support the notion that procrastination is a motivational problem that involves more than poor management skills or trait laziness. It is thus clear that procrastination involves knowing that one is supposed to perform an activity, and perhaps even wanting to do so, yet failing to motivate oneself to perform the activity in the desired or expected time frame indicating the important role of academic motivation in the postponement habit. Therefore, the present paper will focus on the role of motivation in academic procrastination. The purpose of the present research paper is to study academic procrastinators; therefore, students (age group 17-19 years) were selected as a sample for study. Although academic procrastination has been researched extensively, there still remain some areas that have not yet been touched upon. One of the research gap identifies that majority of the researches on academic procrastination has the population of students studying arts subjects especially psychology. This might have biased the results. In order to overcome this gap, students studying in undergraduate courses of technical colleges of Punjab (India) were selected for the study. Thus this research would help to explore a different dimension in the field of procrastination among students attaining technical education. In addition to this, although procrastination has been researched extensively in different Asian countries such as Pakistan (Hussain and Sultan, 2010), Malaysia (Yaakub, 2000), Israel (Milgram, Mey-Tal & Levison, 1998) and Singapore (Tan, Ang , Klassen, Yeo ,Wong, Huan & Chong, 2008), procrastination in the Indian context has not been extensively researched and there was a need to conduct researches in India to identify additional factors specific to the Indian culture that might lead to procrastination. This study would help to achieve this goal.

Based on the Self-Determination Theory given by Deci & Ryan, (1985) and the above given researches, it was presupposed that there will be a significant difference between high and low procrastinators on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with high procrastinators scoring less on intrinsic motivation.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

**2.1 SAMPLE**- A homogenous group of 200 participants (147 males & 53 females) in the age group of 17-19 years (M= 18.82, SD= 0.39) studying in technical universities were tested for the present study. The data was collected on the principle of simple random sampling. Initially, 400 students were tested for their procrastination level out of which 100 high and 100 low procrastinators were selected for further testing their academic motivation.

**2.2 TESTS**- Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS) was used to assess student's procrastination tendency in academic tasks. This scale is developed by L.J. Solomon and E.D. Rothblum (1984). It measures the prevalence of procrastination in six academic areas namely, writing a term paper, studying for an exam, keeping up with weekly reading assignments, performing administrative tasks, attending meetings, and performing academic tasks in general. Specifically, participants are asked to rate the degree to which they procrastinate in that area (1 = never procrastinate to 5 = always procrastinate), procrastination in that area is a problem for them (1 = not at all a problem to 5 = always a problem) and if they want to decrease their procrastination in that area (1 = do not want to decrease to 5 = definitely want to decrease).

Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) was used to assess student's motivation level in academic tasks. This test is developed by R.J.Vallerand and his colleagues. It contains 28 items to be answered on a 7-point rating scale that range from not at all (1) to exactly (7). It is divided into seven subscales, reflecting one subscale of amotivation, three subscales of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation), and three distinct subscales of intrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivation to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation).

Besides these self-report measures, students' aptitude level was reported as an AIEEE rank. AIEEE is an 'All India Engineering Eligibility Entrance' test which indicates the students' capability in engineering stream. Also the students were asked to report their CGPA (Current Grade Point Average) which indicates the present performance in the class.

**2.3 PROCEDURE**- The objective of this study was to explore the motivational differences in high and low academic procrastinators studying in technical universities. The procedure was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, 400 participants were selected by the procedure of simple random sampling. They were tested in eight groups of 50 each. The participants were seated in the classroom and were explained the meaning of procrastination. Then they were provided with PASS with proper instructions to perform the test. In the second phase, 100 high and 100 low academic procrastinators were selected on the basis of PASS score by using quartile deviation, i.e. values below the first quartile were taken as low academic procrastination level and the values above the third quartile were taken as high academic procrastination level. The participants thus selected were given the AMS to assess their academic procrastination level and the type of

academic motivation. The motivational differences in high and low academic procrastinators were analyzed by using the t-test.

Also, a group discussion was carried out for 100 high procrastinators in 4 groups of 25 students each. The discussion was based on the students' academic motivation and academic procrastination levels. The feedback was analyzed with reference to AIEEE rank and CGPA score.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For the present research an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the motivational differences in high and low academic procrastinators. The result of t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between high and low procrastinators in terms of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. As is seen from Table 1, high procrastinators exhibit less of intrinsic motivation to know (M=18.53, SD=5.34), to accomplish (M=15.87, SD=4.92, to experience stimulation (M=15.06, SD=4.98) , identified extrinsic motivation (M=20.00, SD=4.98) and amotivation (M=10.95 ,SD=6.08) as compared to low procrastinators' intrinsic motivation to know (M=21.93, SD=4.48), to accomplish (M=17.51, SD=4.51), to experience stimulation (M=17.09, SD=4.83), identified extrinsic motivation (M=21.42, SD=4.39) and amotivation (M=8.87, SD=4.96).

(Table to be placed here)

High and low procrastinators differ significantly on intrinsic motivation to know, t (198) =-4.88 indicating that procrastination is related to lack of several constructs such as exploration, curiosity and satisfaction experienced while learning. Thus, such students delay tasks because they do not possess intrinsic intellectuality and innate psychological need for competence. If they would have been intrinsically motivated, there would have been no delay in the initiation of a task because of the sheer pleasure derived from participation.

A significant difference, t(198)=-2.46, between high and low procrastinators on intrinsic motivation to accomplish has been found indicating that students low on procrastination engage in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction experienced when they attempt to accomplish or create something. Such students focus on the process of achieving rather than on the outcome. Thus, according to the finding, high procrastinators do not possess intrinsic motivation to accomplish because it requires the students to extend their work beyond the prescribed outlines in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction. In this attempt, they may have to surpass themselves which is not a characteristic of high procrastinators.

High and low procrastinators also differ significantly on intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, t (198) =-2.93. The fact that high procrastinators delay the task at hand and engage themselves in other activities explains that they are not motivated enough for the academic tasks. On the other hand, students low on procrastination go to the class in order to experience excitement of a stimulating class discussion , or read a book for the intense feeling of cognitive pleasure derived from passionate and exciting passages and thus are intrinsically motivated to experience stimulation in education. With these findings, the first part of the hypothesis which states that there will be a significant difference between high and low procrastinators on intrinsic motivation has been proved.

Considering the extrinsic motivation, high and low procrastinators differ significantly only on identified extrinsic motivation, t (198) = -2.14. This finding is in line with previous researches which indicate that students whose motivation is external are more likely to procrastinate (Christopher, 1998). Low procrastinators show more of identified extrinsic motivation as they do not delay the start of an academic activity because it becomes valued, is judged important for the individual and is perceived as chosen by oneself. In comparison, high procrastinators do not realize the importance of a particular academic task and thus keep on postponing it. The other two constructs of extrinsic motivation i.e. external regulation (behavior is regulated through external means such as reward or constraints) and introjection (individual begins to internalize the reasons for his or her actions) do not differ significantly in high and low procrastinators. Thus, the second part of the hypothesis which states that there will be a significant difference between high and low procrastinators on extrinsic motivation has not been proved by the present results.

The third construct amotivation indicates a tendency when individuals do not perceive contingencies between outcomes and their own actions. They are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. They perceive their behavior as caused by forces out of their own control. Eventually, they may stop participating in academic activities and thus start procrastinating. However, the present findings indicate that high and low procrastinators do not differ significantly on amotivation.

The group discussion which was carried out after the data analysis revealed another interesting finding. There were many students who were found to have a good AIEEE rank and thus they were able to secure admission in engineering colleges. However, their CGPA was low and also they were found to be high on procrastination. This finding indicates that their academic motivation level had suddenly dropped although they had sufficient capability in the engineering stream. The feedback given by such students revealed that their high procrastination level was instrumental in a low motivation score and thus lowered CGPA. This indicated that certain other factors may be responsible for lowering the motivation level of a person in academics and thereby increasing his/her academic procrastination level.

To conclude, the findings of the present paper demonstrate that lack of intrinsic academic motivation may increase the probability of academic procrastination. This has been pointed out in a research by Senecal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995 that students with intrinsic reasons for pursuing academic tasks procrastinated less than those with less autonomous reasons including extrinsic motivation and

amotivation. Similar results have also been reported by Senecal, Julien &Guay (2003) indicating that students who are regulated through intrinsic motivation and identified regulation towards scholastic work, experience low levels of academic procrastination. On the other hand students who are motivated through external regulation, introjected regulation or those who are amotivated experience high levels of academic procrastination. And it is clear from the results that low procrastinators have significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation to know, to accomplish and to experience stimulation as compared to high procrastinators. Also, low procrastinators differ significantly from high procrastinators in terms of identified extrinsic motivation and amotivation. The group discussion analysis revealed that certain other factors may be responsible for lowering the motivation level of a person in academics and thereby increasing his/her academic procrastination level.

However, the limitation of the present study is that only the motivational factors of the procrastinators were evaluated and other factors were not considered. For future research directions, a complete picture of procrastination would establish a causal relationship between procrastination and its correlates by considering situational factors (Bui, 2007 reported that procrastination can be reduced by decreasing evaluation threat), task characteristics such as task aversiveness (Onwuenbuzie & Collins, 2001) as well as cognitive variables (Beck, Koons & Milgram, 2000) leading to delaying behavior etc.

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