

Yes, no, maybe

Bilge Uzun Ozer reports on the findings of a recent cross-cultural study that compared procrastination among undergraduates in the UK and Turkey

Procrastination, defined as a tendency to voluntarily delay an intended course of action¹, has received much research attention over the last two decades. This increased attention has been attributed to its high prevalence: in recent studies, between 80 to 95 per cent of students in the USA reported procrastinating, and half of them considered themselves to be problematic procrastinators². However, few studies have investigated procrastination within a cross-cultural framework, and most research has been situated in a Western setting. Furthermore, limited cross-cultural studies have focused on adult or adolescent samples.

In this respect, the present study I was involved in, carried out during the spring semester of 2013-2014 academic year, was aimed at understanding the prevalence of procrastination across a diverse cross-cultural student sample by comparing undergraduates in the UK and Turkey. A total of 704 students (213 male and 491 female) participated in the study. Of these, 402 students (114 males, 288 females) were from the UK and 302 students (99 males, 203 females) were from Turkey. The participants, first and second year psychology students, were recruited from several universities and colleges across both countries. The Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students³, the Decisional Procrastination Scale⁴ and the General Procrastination Scale⁵ were administered to volunteer students in classroom settings.

Analysis revealed no significant differences between the Turkish male and female students' procrastination levels. However, a significant sex difference was found between the academic procrastination levels of students living in the UK. Specifically, female students reported procrastinating more on academic tasks, such as writing course essays, attending lectures and studying for exams, when compared with male students. In terms of the comparison of procrastination levels between the two countries, students living in the UK reported procrastinating more about their decisions than the students living in Turkey. Similarly, their general procrastination scores were found to be higher than Turkish students. Results also showed a significant difference between Turkish and British students' academic procrastination scores, with analysis demonstrating that students in the UK procrastinate more than students in Turkey on writing course assignments, studying for exams and attending lectures.

Overall, the results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the procrastination levels of the students from the UK and Turkey. The limited literature that exists has not shown differences between procrastination in different countries. Therefore the study challenges current findings and literature, and further research is warranted to examine these incompatible findings.

Procrastination is an important issue for students because, while it may appear to make life more pleasant, it almost always causes stress, disorganisation and potentially academic failure. The belief that 'later is better' is a common illusion behind the 'I'll do it tomorrow' outlook because, when tomorrow comes, the pattern

of putting off is repeated. Procrastination can thus become a thorn in a student's side, which can hold them back.

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