



International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEPSY 2010)

Effects of Academic Procrastination on College Students' Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of procrastination on students' life satisfaction among a group of college students. In this regard, Tuckman Procrastination Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale were administered to 314 (214 female, 100 male) college students. The average age of the participants was 20.76 ($SD = 1.97$) with an age range between 17 and 27. The results of the preliminary analysis showed that 38 % (119) of the students claimed to be frequent procrastinator, with male students reporting more frequent procrastination than female students do. Results of the ANOVA yielded a significant difference for academic procrastination level on satisfaction with life score. Specifically, procrastinators reported to have lower life satisfaction score than do non-procrastinators.

Keywords: Procrastination, Satisfaction with life, College students

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Procrastination is a tendency to postpone what is necessary to reach goal (Lay, 1986). The growing body of literature has demonstrated it as a personality characteristic far more than time management (Ferrari, Johnson, & McCown, 1995). It is a complex process with affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986). The idea underlying procrastination is that ‘later is better’ and this is also a common illusion behind ‘tomorrow outlook’. However, when tomorrow comes, the pattern resurfaces, and procrastinators excuse themselves by promising that ‘I will do it tomorrow’. Hence, procrastination is seen as a ‘tomorrow syndrome’ (Knaus, 2002).

Procrastination appears to be a significant problem especially among university students. Although there are many possible reasons for the occurrence of procrastination in students, researchers (Rothblum et al., 1986) suggested that fear of failure and task aversiveness are two distinct reasons for procrastination. Fear of failure incorporates concerns about meeting other people’s expectation, about meeting perfectionist standards, and about lack of self-confidence. Task aversiveness is another reason which students engage in when presented with boring or overwhelming tasks (Ferrari et al., 1995). Still another view why particularly university students procrastinate is that probably they have done it before and it worked. Generally students look back on several years of high school in which they have done consistently well despite constantly procrastinating. Then they might discover that in high school they could do things well even at the last minute (Palmer, 1998).

Most of the existing literature on procrastination has concentrated on the negative side of procrastination. Ferrai and Tice (2000), for instance, have depicted on procrastination as a form of self-handicapping or it might be engaged in to protect the threatened self-esteem (Ferrari, 1991b). Hence, particularly the university population frequently seeks help from counselors and they complain about how badly this habit makes them feel (Schowuenburg, Lay, Pychyl, & Ferrari, 2004) and might bring lower level of life satisfaction. On the other hand, some other researchers (König & Kleninmann, 2004; Sigall, Kruglanski, & Fyock, 2000) have seen procrastination in a positive side. According to the researchers (Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000) it is generally acknowledged that putting something off quite rational and makes individuals feel good. This is particularly true when they put some aversive tasks off and do some enjoyable instead.

To conclude, the literature related to procrastination suggests some implication for further research. First, research studies have shown a somewhat mixed picture of procrastination associated with its components in college students (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). Although it is evident that engaging in procrastination in academic setting bring some negative outcomes (Keller, 1968; Semb, Glick, & Spencer, 1979); investigating the prevalence of procrastination in non-English speaking countries drawn less attention in the literature. In the second line of research, the purpose of procrastination seems to make the one's life more pleasant but it nearly always adds the stress, disorganization and failure (Clayton, 2000). So the findings have shown that procrastination has double faces giving short term pleasure but long term stress (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). In this regard, the present research attempts to expand the earlier focus by looking at the effect of procrastination on college students' satisfaction with life levels.

Method

Participants

The present research was carried out with a sample of 314 (214 female, 100 male) college students enrolled in various departments at a major state-funded university in the capital of Turkey. The average age of the participants was 20.76 (SD = 1.97) with an age range between 17 and 27. The participants consisted of 99 first year students, 73 sophomores, 62 juniors, and 80 seniors.

Instruments

The Tuckman Procrastination Scale (TPS) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used as the data collection instruments.

Tuckman Procrastination Scale (TPS). The Tuckman Procrastination Scale was developed to assess college students' procrastination tendencies (Tuckman, 1991). The English version of the instrument consisted of sixteen-items and had a single factor structure (Tuckman, 1991). The Turkish version consisted of 14 items with single factor structure (Uzun Özer, Saçkes, & Tuckman, 2009b). The instrument produced high reliability coefficients for the measurements. In the original study Cronbach's alpha was 0.86 (Tuckman, 1991) and in a more recent study a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.89 was reported (Tuckman, 2007). In another study with Turkish high school students Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.82 (Klassen & Kuzucu, 2009). For each Procrastination scale item,

respondents were asked to rate themselves on a five-point Likert scale ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}$, $5 = \text{strongly agree}$). A high score indicates a high level of procrastination and the highest possible score is 70. The scale included four negatively stated items that require reverse coding before calculating a total score.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWSL). Satisfaction with Life Scale was developed to identify the individual differences concerning the cognitive evaluation of one's life Diener, Emmons, Larsem, and Griffin (1985). The scale is a 5-point ($1 = \text{Strongly disagree}$; $5 = \text{Strongly agree}$) Likert type, self-report measure. The scale includes 5 items and showed a single factor structure (Diener et al., 1985). The internal consistency of the scale was reported to be .87 and test-retest reliability with two-month intervals was found to be .82 (Diener et al., 1985). SWLS was translated into Turkish by Köker (1991). Internal consistency coefficient calculated by Cronbach Alpha Formula was reported as .89. Test-retest reliability coefficient was found as .85. the Cronbach Alpha estimation was found to be .83 for the present sample.

Results

The overall academic procrastination mean of the sample was 39.02.6 ($SD = 10.02$) with the scores ranged between 14 and 70. The median split of the first part of the scale which was 37.8 was used to determine the procrastinators and non-procrastinators as used in most studies for self-reported scales. Level of procrastination among students was calculated and the result showed that 38% (118) of the students claimed to be frequent procrastinator, while 62% (196) reported to procrastinate rarely.

Results of the 2 (gender) x 4 (grade levels) ANOVA performed to find out the gender and grade difference on students' procrastination score yielded a significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 309) = 7.742$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .024$. Specifically, male students ($M = 41.42$; $SD = 10.34$) reported procrastinating significantly more than female students ($M = 37.85$; $SD = 9.84$).

Results of the ANOVA performed to examine the effect of procrastination scale score on students' satisfaction with life scale scores revealed a significant difference for procrastination level on satisfaction with life score $F(1, 317) = 7.786$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .081$. Specifically, procrastinators ($M = 19.94$; $SD = 5.95$) reported to have lower life satisfaction score than non-procrastinators ($M = 23.34$; $SD = 5.30$).

Discussion

The main purpose of the present research was to examine the effect of procrastination on life satisfaction of a group of college students. In this regards, procrastination and satisfaction with life scale were administered to college students aging between 17 and 27.

The results of the descriptive statistics showed that the overall mean of the sample was 37.8. A total of 118 out of 314 participants (38%) scored high on procrastination, based on the median split criteria. In other words, 38% of the participants reported to be frequent procrastinator. In this regard, the present findings showed to be consistency with the previous results that, half of the student procrastinate but most of them procrastinate always or nearly always (Solomon, Murakami, Greenberger, & Rothblum, 1983; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Uzun Özer, Demir, & Ferrari, 2009a)

The literature regarding gender differences on procrastination has been showing some differences. To date, plenty of research studies have been conducted with varied samples and each has showed unique results. The present findings was found consistent with some research indicated gender difference in the incidence of procrastination (Effert & Ferrari, 1989; Rothblum et al., 1986; Uzun Özer et al., 2009a) and inconsistent with the others suggested that no significant difference between female and males' procrastination level (Ferrari, 1991a; Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay, 1998; Hess, Sherman, & Goodman, 2000; Johnson & Bloom, 1995; Rothblum et al., 1986; Watson, 2001).

Moreover, the effect of procrastination on students' life satisfaction was investigated. The findings revealed that participants who had higher levels of procrastination reported to have higher life satisfaction more than did the participants who have lower procrastination scores. In this regard, the findings in the present study are found consistent with the popular view on procrastination in that the procrastination tendency in students brings negative feelings (Clayton, 2000; Ferrari, 1991a; Ferrari & Tice, 2000; Nicholson & Scharff, 2007).

Several implications may be drawn from the findings for the university counseling center, psychologists and health care officers. The results of the present study pointed that most of the students frequently engage in procrastination. Hence the results may provide valuable data for counselor and educators to be aware of the procrastination levels of the students particularly in academic setting. Finally, making inferences from the results from the present study that point the personality difference among the students with respect to some factors, it can

be suggested that overcoming procrastination workshops should be arranged for students by taking into consideration the effect of procrastination on students' life satisfaction.

Several limitations should be considered for the present study. As the present data were based on the convenient sampling drawn from the public university students; further research with larger and more demographically diverse populations would strengthen the findings of the study. It is also suggested that future studies be conducted with samples from different universities, and different regions of Turkey will be useful. Furthermore, future directions for research with students may include studies that examine the relationship between procrastination levels and the actual behavioral procrastination.

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