

Academic procrastination of high school students

Abstract: The main goal of this study is to expand on the existing knowledge about procrastination among high school students by investigating the prevalence and possible reasons for academic procrastination. The sample consisted of 441 high school students who filled in the questionnaire with two procrastination self-assessment scales (PSS and PASS). Statistical methods were used to evaluate the data. There were no non-procrastinators among the students. The prevalence of procrastination did not differ according to gender, grade level or number of siblings. It appears that non-working students tend to procrastinate more as compared to working students. Students procrastinate mainly because of laziness, task averseness, the tendency to feel overwhelmed and poorly managed use of time. On the other hand, students procrastinate the least because of the fear of success, risk-taking or perfectionism. The proposed recommendations for reducing the effects of procrastination would help students to better manage university studies.

Keywords: Academic procrastination, high schools, postponing tasks for later, statistical analysis

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Introduction

The term procrastination comes from the Latin word pro-crastinus, which means belonging to tomorrow (Ludwig, 2013). Procrastination is a common problem, which can be defined as the act of unnecessarily delaying a task to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984). Academic procrastination is considered to be more common among college students rather than among younger students. Nevertheless, studies revealed that the prevalence of procrastination in college students compared to high school students is not much different. It appears that at least half of the students tend to procrastinate, no matter whether they study on high school or college (Atalayin et al., 2018; Özer, 2009). Khan et al. (2014) found that younger students (below 20 years) tend to procrastinate even more than older students. Based on these findings, this study focused on high school students instead of college students.

Academic procrastination is one of the main reasons for the early termination of university studies right at the beginning. Universities are currently fighting for a sufficient number of successful students. Therefore, they must look for ways not only to attract and enrol students, but also to retain them. The main goal of our study was to determine the prevalence of academic procrastination and its causes in the case of secondary school students, by using a questionnaire survey based on the PSS and PASS scale. In addition to the goals for the study, some recommendations for reducing the effects of procrastination are proposed.

Materials and methods

The survey took place within high schools, which can be considered an acquisition area for FSE UJEP in Ústí nad Labem. The samples consisted of 441 students (287 females and 154 males) from five different high schools. First to fourth year students were involved.

Our first research question was, which causes of procrastination are the most common and which are less common.

H₀₁: There are no differences between the causes of procrastination.

Our second research question was, therefore, what is the structure of the rate of procrastination within the participating schools, whether they differ and whether there are non-procrastinators.

H₀₂: The structure of the procrastination rate is comparable across all participating schools.

Last but not least, we were interested in what other factors may affect the rate of procrastination.

H₀₃: Procrastination rate does not depend on the factor.

All participants completed the questionnaire that contained two self-assessment scales (PSS and PASS). Several identification questions, such as sex, GPA (grade point average), number of siblings, with whom the participants share a room within the household or grade level (freshman to senior year) were also included.

The first mentioned scale was the Procrastination Scale for Student Population (PSS) designed by Lay (1986), it contains 20 items and students rate the items on 5-point Likert scale. PSS was used to reveal the frequency of academic procrastination. According to scale score (from 20 to 100 points), Lay's scale divides students into four groups of procrastinators, from non-procrastinators to heavy procrastinators. The second used measure was the Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students (PASS) developed by Solomon and Rothblum (1984). The scale is divided into two sections. The first section measures the frequency of procrastination in six academic areas: 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. In the second section of scale, two statements for each reason are listed and students rate the statements on 5-point Likert scale. Authors identified following thirteen reasons: evaluation anxiety, perfectionism, difficulty making decisions, dependency and help seeking, aversiveness of the task and low frustration tolerance, lack of self-confidence, laziness, lack of assertion, fear of success, tendency to feel overwhelmed and poorly managed time, rebellion against control, risk-taking and peer influence.

Although, it is possible to measure the frequency of procrastination with the first part of scale. The first section of scale was not used in this study because of one reason. It was identified that the PSS scale is a more suitable method for measuring academic procrastination in Czech conditions (Gabrhelík, 2008).

Results

In this study, findings revealed that 40% of students reported a high level of procrastination (marked as heavy procrastinators), 34% of students with a moderate level of procrastination (moderate or middle procrastinators) and 26% students reported a low level of procrastination (marked as light procrastinators).

Table 1: Average rates of causes of procrastination, 2020 (source: own calculation)

	Friedman test	Mean
Laziness	9.75	3.55
Aversiveness of the task and low frustration tolerance	9.02	3.28
Tendency to feel overwhelmed and poorly manage time	8.98	3.29
Difficulty making decisions	8.56	3.09
Lack of self-confidence	7.53	2.82
Peer influence	6.97	2.69
Dependency and help seeking	6.79	2.58
Evaluation anxiety	6.78	2.59
Lack of assertion	6.74	2.55
Perfectionism	5.72	2.35
Risk-taking	5.36	2.21
Rebellion against control	4.94	2.11
Fear of success	3.85	1.81

We tested the differences in the level of individual causes of procrastination using the Friedman test and subsequent post hoc analysis. A p-value $\ll 0.01$ confirmed statistically significant differences. Table 1 shows that students procrastinate mainly because of laziness, aversiveness of the task and low frustration tolerance, and the tendency to feel overwhelmed and poorly manage time. On the other hand, fear of success, risk-taking or perfectionism were the least common reasons for procrastination.

It turned out that students with a higher level of procrastination had a worse GPA. This study also revealed that non-working students tend to procrastinate a bit more compared to working students. The prevalence of procrastination did not differ according to gender, grade level or number of siblings, with whom the participants share a room within the household. Also, it was not proved that the frequency of procrastination varies among students from different high schools.

Conclusion

The main goal of the study was to determine the prevalence of academic procrastination and its causes in case of secondary school students, by using a questionnaire survey based on the PSS and PASS scale. The main motivation for this goal was to find ways to reduce and prevent early school leaving at the very beginning. The main recommendations for minimizing the consequences of procrastination, from the point of view of the institution, can be by the utilization of the introduction of professional advice, reduction of unnecessary choice, shortening deadlines, determining clear responsibility for their actions, though, also by providing positive feedback. The main recommendations for minimizing the consequences of procrastination from the student's point of view can be the involvement in team work, reducing distractions and/or good planning.

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