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Relationships between Self-Efficacy and the Academic Procrastination Behaviour among University Students in Malaysia: A General Perspective

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Abstract

Procrastination behaviour is a common phenomenon among people. In educational setting it always related to the student academic performance. Past studies have shown that the tendency of student to procrastinate could affect their academic life. For example, studying in the last minute is a procrastination behaviour committed by the students. This study is conducted to explore the association between academic procrastination, self-efficacy and academic performance among university students in Malaysia. The finding showed that most students are prone to procrastinate in their academic life. However in most cases it appears that the procrastination behaviour does not affect the student's academic performance. A similar situation also recorded where the self-efficacy does not affect the tendency for student to procrastinate in their academic activities. It is suggested that in improving the student performance at the university the direct and indirect factors should be addressed including the academic procrastination behaviours. It was concluded that the student's academic performance is influenced not directly by procrastination behaviour but by other factors. Several suggestions and recommendations are also presented.

Keywords: Procrastination behaviour, self-efficacy, academic performance.

Introduction

Success in academic life has been linked to the characteristics of self-regulated learners (Corno, *et al.*, 2002; Pintrich, 2004) which related to the ability of the students to be in control of their activities. Among the factors that affect to this ability is the student self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1990; Senécal, Koestner, and Vallerand, 1995; Chu and Choi, 2005). In fact the student self-efficacy has long been considered as a key component of self-regulated learning among adult learners as well as an essential variable in maintaining control over one's actions (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002). This means that self-efficacy, which is the belief that a person can become specialized in dealing with a situation and thus produce positive outcome, can make a significant contribution in helping university students succeed. So in Bandura's (1991) view whether students achieve or not, it is largely subject to their self-efficacy regarding their studies.

The concept of self-efficacy was applied by Schunk (2011 as cited in Santrock, 2011) to various divisions of students' attainment. According to his stand, the choice of activities of a student is influenced by his/her self-efficacy. Various learning tasks, particularly the challenging ones might be avoided by who have low levels of self-efficacy for academic tasks, while these tasks are approached positively by students with high level of self-efficacy and their chances of persistency in effort involved in learning task are more than students having low self-efficacy (Schunk and Pajares, 2009). Higher academic goals and aspirations were shown by adolescents having high self-efficacy than low-self-efficacy. These students spent more duration of time in doing their homework and had more chances to link learning activities with appropriate experience than low-self-efficacy students (Bassi, *et al.*, 2007). A relatively new study found that a thorough and well managed approach for study was more likely to be adopted by students having high self-efficacy for reading and writing, while a superficial approach was more likely to be adopted by students with low-self-efficacy (Wolters and Corkin, 2012). So it can be noted that in order to successfully regulated one's academic life, a higher education student should be more self-efficacious in his belief about his/her academics and the ability the direct his/her academic life.

University's academic life requires very precise effort and attention from the students. Every moment they need to devote patience and persistence. They need to devote their time mostly on completing various tasks such as attending classes, submitting assignments, engage in group discussion, submitting projects and so forth. In regards to their academic success it requires them to regulate their learning so that the academic requirement is fulfilled. However sometimes this self-regulation of learning, which is of prime importance for a higher learner, does not seem to be available readily and it can become difficult to for a university student to regulate his academic activities.

As such, the failure to successfully regulate one's own learning can also occur. This failure can take many forms but one of the most common (and potentially quite harmful one) is known as procrastination (Santrock, 2011). Procrastination can be defined as the intentional delay of an important task in the favor of an unimportant and trivial task in order to avoid doing the important task. Delaying the important task usually causes hindrance in its completion and makes the person become less productive than he/she can otherwise be (Wolters and Corkin, 2012). Procrastination can be defined behaviourally as the act of postponing initiating or doing work that is necessary to complete a task that one intends to complete within a specific timeframe (Wolters and Corkin, 2012).

The manifestation of procrastination with regard to academic tasks, assignments, or obligations can be called academic procrastination. Academic procrastination has been examined in relation to academic performance along with numerous other outcomes. For the most part, academic procrastination has been linked to several negative indicators of learning outcomes (Wolters and Corkin, 2012). As procrastination can be found in many aspects of one's life and it is quite pervasive phenomenon in terms of its effect on different strata of people.

Academic Procrastination among University Students

It is evidence that procrastination among university students can lead to a lot of undesirable consequences. It can develop emotional disturbance and poor academic performance (Ferrari, O'Callaghan, and Newbegin, 2005; Solomon and Rothblum, 1984 as cited in Klassen and Kuzucu, 2009) and also escalating the possibilities of unease, burden and illness among students (e.g., Ferrari *et al.*, 2005; Howell, Watson, Powell, and Buro, 2006; Schraw, Wadkins, and Olafson, 2007; Tice and Baumeister, 1997; Wolters, 2003 as cited in Klassen and Kuzucu, 2009). To underline the seriousness of this phenomena Dewitte and Schouwenburg (2002) found that such procrastination behaviour would induce incomplete assigned tasks, cramming instead of understanding the subject matter, social and/or test anxiety, employment of self-crippling strategies, poor achievement, dread of failure, distressed mental health. On the other hand Chu and Choi (2005) argue that procrastination can be an active and

chosen activity where individuals can take control of it and hence do it in their benefit and it can somewhat be neutral for the students (if not emphatically beneficial).

Research on procrastination has been conducted within fields such as education, psychology, political science, economics, and sociology. Much of the research, however, has focused on examining this phenomenon within academic settings where there continues to be a debate about the nature, causes, and outcomes of procrastination. More firmly established is that procrastination is a widespread occurrence within academic settings, especially among college students. Estimates suggest that between 50% and 95% of college students procrastinate on a regular basis (Steel and Ferrari, 2013). Moreover, the rate of troublesome academic procrastination was shown to be between 70% and 95% in some studies (Ellis and Knaus, 1977), with some estimates as high as 95% (Steel, 2007).

Furthermore it is believed that it afflicts university students across the globe (Burka and Yuen, 2008; Steel, 2011) but most of the studies are from western and/or individualistic societies and data from Asian countries like Malaysia is actually very scarce. Motivation studies are increasingly focusing to explore how procrastination is affecting academic achievement of students, their mental health and socio-educational outcomes but most of the research has usually involved students from western countries (Klassen and Kuzucu, 2009; Steel, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, procrastination is taken as the anti-motivation or anti self-regulation in the students. So it is apt to investigate the variables that are known to affect self-regulation. According to social cognitive theory, self-regulation is strongly associated with self-efficacy to self-regulate (Bandura, 1991). The measurement of a person's ability to attain goals and effectively finish tasks is self-efficacy. Every aspect of human endeavor is affected by it. The path and options a person will choose and the true potential of a person to overcome difficulties is highly influenced by a person's own belief about his/her power to affect certain situations and conditions. These effects are noticeable and convincing regarding the management of health and education affecting behaviours (Luszczynska and Schwarzer, 2005). However this variable of self-efficacy is usually regarded as domain specific and so it is studies in relation to a specific behaviour or setting such as self-efficacy to regulate oneself, academic self-efficacy and as such (Bandura, 1991). This domain specific nature of self-efficacy has been juxtaposed by a more general form of self-efficacy by (Scholz *et al.*, 2002) referring to it as general self-efficacy as a set of global set of positive beliefs about one's ability to perform in a wide areas of one's life.

In terms of academic performance, Wolters and Corkin (2012) point out that studies have consistently found negative relations between procrastination and cumulative GPA and final exam scores and assignment grades. University Students who have low confidence in the ability to self-regulate their academic issues tend to be more procrastinating than students who show high self-efficacy and confidence in self-regulation (Senécal, Koestner, and Vallerand, 1995). In many studies, procrastination and low self-efficacy to self-regulate were related to each other negatively (Senécal, Koestner, and Vallerand, 1995; Adeyemo, 2007). It has been argued by Brownlow and Reasinger (2000) and Day *et al.* (2000) that procrastination affects academic achievement negatively and procrastinators are at a greater risk of failing. On the other hand Chu and Choi (2005) suggested that students with high self-efficacy did not delay starting working and showed persistence when faced with difficult tasks while the students with low self-efficacy showed procrastination, so self-efficacy can be regarded as the leading force in perseverance of student's productive academic behaviours.

Interestingly, there is a tendency while officially categorizing any behavioural abnormality among the mental health professionals. As Kring, Johnson, Davison, and Neale (2009) have put forth that the behavioural problem must be causing handicapping or dysfunction in a person's daily/routine life. Although procrastination is not considered a behavioural abnormality warranting diagnosis but still there is a need to get some idea about the severity of this behavioural problem called procrastination. There should be some studies aiming to know the level of suffering among people and to help those in need. So the present study makes itself quite useful by measuring the level of procrastination among university students to have a hint about the degree of tribulation faced by such students.

Tuckman (1991) noted an inverse relationship between general self-efficacy beliefs and procrastination among college students but this general self-efficacy has not yet been extensively studied. More studies are needed on the connection between general self-efficacy and with other related variable so this variable of general self-efficacy is studied in this research to find whether it is linked with behaviours such as procrastination and outcomes such as academic achievement among university students. Moreover the obtained data from the university students in Malaysia will be seen on its own to measure the general level of self-efficacy among the participants.

Many psychological variables have been examined in an effort to understand why students procrastinate on academic tasks. In terms of task characteristics, studies have consistently shown task aversiveness to be a positive predictor of procrastination. Not surprisingly, when students' perceive

tasks to be unpleasant, boring, or difficult they are more likely to put off getting started on them (Steel, 2011). Another task characteristic examined is the amount of time allotted to complete a task, sometimes labeled timing of rewards and punishment. The logic here is that individuals are less likely to procrastinate as a deadline nears because the positive or negative repercussions of completing the task become more immediate and significant.

It has been noted that self-efficacy (in various domains) and self-esteem have been consistently found to be strongly and negatively associated with procrastination (Wolters and Corkin, 2012) but again in the western and individualistic countries and without considering general self-efficacy as a specific variable of interest. The study on Malaysian context has given flavour to the body of knowledge pertaining to procrastination behaviour among university students. This as such enriches the comparative finding among the western and the eastern context. Therefore several issues have been identified as follows:

1. To identify the nature academic procrastination among the participants
2. To measure the level of general self-efficacy among the participants
3. To determine how the student's self-efficacy influencing their tendency to commit academic procrastination, and finally
4. To test how the student's academic procrastination could impact the student's academic achievement.

Method

This descriptive study was conducted in one of the most prominent research university in Malaysia namely Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). It is located in the southern part of Peninsular of Malaysia in the State of Johor. Currently UTM has around 25000 student ranges from undergraduate programmes to postgraduate. It has various of programme which mainly based on engineering and science field of study.

The participants of the study were full time students who are now continuing their study at various field of study. Considering of it difficulties and the nature of the programme that the students were studying the selection of the respondent has been decided by using purposive sampling which were include both the undergraduate and postgraduate. However as for comparison they have been categorised into two types of field of study which are social sciences and physical sciences. The involvement of the respondents was mainly based on volunteerism which means only for those who are willing to participate were selected. As such a total of 100 students were involved in the study (29 from social sciences and 71 from physical sciences).

The instrument for this study is questionnaires which measuring two major construct such the student's self-efficacy and the academic procrastination. This questionnaire was adapted from various sources such as *Luszczynska et al.*, 2005; *Scholz et al.*, 2002; *Tuckman et al.*, 2008; *Tuckman*, 1991. The questionnaire has been tested for reliability and validity. 20 university students completed the questionnaire for the test. It was found that for the self-efficacy construct the Chronbach Alpha coefficient was 0.83 and for the academic procrastination construct was 0.76. Apart from the demographic information, these two constructs were expected to provide the student's self-efficacy and their academic procrastination while studying at the university.

Data collected have been analysed by using several statistical analysis such as frequencies, percentages, *t*-test, Anova and Pearson correlation to answer the research questions.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1

The Nature Of Academic Procrastination Among Participants

Table 1. The nature of academic procrastination among students

	Participants	Percentage
Not Procrastinators	0	0%
Not Serious Procrastinators	21	21%
Procrastinators	67	67%
Serious Procrastinators	12	12%

N = 100

The Table 1 shows the nature of the student's academic procrastination among participants based on the percentages. It tells us that out of 100 participants agreement none of them can be categorised as

“Not Procrastinators”, 21 falls under the category of “Not Serious Procrastinators”, 67 falls under the category of “Procrastinators”, and 12 falls under the category of “Serious Procrastinators”. Considering the distortion of the responses distribution, it seems that the tendencies to procrastinate among students are higher. In other words, it implies that every student have a tendency to commit as an academic procrastinator. This is not a healthy finding for student’s academic life at the university.

Research Question 2 The Level Of Self-Efficacy Among Participants Towards Academic

Table 2. The Level Of Student’s Self-Efficacy Towards Academic

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Efficacy Towards Academic	30.64	4.61
N = 100		

It appears from Table 2 that the level of student’s self-efficacy towards academic is at moderate level (mean score = 30.64: SD = 4.61). This is to show that in terms of academic orientation the students have a moderate self-efficacy level. Presumably it is related to the student tendency to procrastinate which reflected the answer why the student’s self-efficacy were at the moderate level.

Research Question 3 The Correlation between Self-Efficacy and the Student Academic Procrastination

Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse the relationship between self-efficacy and the student’s academic procrastination. Table 3 below shows low negative relationship between self-efficacy and the academic procrastination ($r = -0.186$; $p < 0.05$). As for low negative correlation recorded the indication to imply that the level of the student self-efficacy is correlated significantly to the academic procrastination can be ignored. In other words it is sensible to claim that the student academic procrastination does not affected at least directly by their self-efficacy.

Table 3. Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Self-Efficacy and the Student’s Academic Procrastination

Variable	Academic Procrastination	<i>P</i>
Self-Efficacy	-0.186**	0.008

** = $p < .05$

Research Question 4 The Correlation between the Academic Procrastination and the Academic Performance

Pearson product moment correlation was also used to analyse the relationship between the academic procrastination and the student’s academic performance. Table 4 below shows low negative relationship between self-efficacy and the academic procrastination ($r = -0.135$; $p < 0.05$). As for low negative correlation recorded the indication to imply that the level of the academic procrastination to the student academic performance is correlated significantly can be ignored. Similarly, it is evidence that the student academic achievement does not affected so much by their procrastination behaviour at least in a more direct relationship.

Table 4. Pearson Product Moment Correlation between the Academic Procrastination and the Student’s Academic Performance

Variable	Academic Performance	<i>p</i>
Procrastination	-0.135**	0.067

** = $p < .05$

Contradicted to what being expected as a student which should have high self-efficacy they were reported to have moderate self-efficacy towards their academic life at the university. In regards to

procrastination there are indications to claim that the participants to become a procrastinator in their academic life. Analysis of correlation of self-efficacy on the academic procrastination however is not significantly correlated. The same result recorded between the academic procrastination and the student's academic performance. It implies that there are other variables that influence the student academic performance in their studying life at the university.

Discussions and Recommendations

Procrastination among University Students

The finding implies that every single student have the tendency to procrastinate in their academic life. As mention by Tuckman, *et al.* (2008) this tendency however are not of a severe intensity. Similar findings were also recorded elsewhere among students where their procrastination levels are moderate (Klassen & Kuzucu, 2009; Yaakub, 2000). In this sense procrastination can be regarded as a nuisance that every university students has to deal with during his/her study at the university. Interestingly in other countries like US, the UK, South Africa, Canada, it was found that the tendency of more students to procrastinate are high (Wyk, 2005; Day, *et al.*, 2000; Ferrari, O'Callaghan, & Newbegin, 2005; Harriott & Ferrari, 1996; Ferrari, Díaz-Morales, O'Callaghan, Díaz, & Argumedo, 2007). It appears that the estimated number of serious procrastinators is different from one country to the other.

Another explanation could be from the standpoint of self-regulated learning perspective. We can postulate that the students are somehow utilise more resources of regulation and as such they are metacognitively more aware of their work and the tendency to procrastinate are less in terms of severity (Purdie, Hattie, and Douglas, 1996). As personal achievement is highly praise and is beneficial (and sometimes essential) for all of the family members in a such collectivistic society which can direct a person to not only go forth in the direction of desired academic task but also can induce serious concerns regarding failure as his/her failure, so they may seem to procrastinate but just stops before reaching extreme levels or severity (Hofstede, 2001). For those who really experiencing the difficulties of overcoming the behaviour should requires assistance from others. Because if this does not well taken care will bring the students of mental health and academic performance at risk (Tuckman, *et al.*, 2008).

Self-Efficacy among University Students

In regards to the student self-efficacy this study has shown similarities in terms of it characteristics. As reported by Schwarzer *et al.* (1997) it can be deduced that, on average the university students have this characteristic of being 'satisfactory' on their self-belief. This finding resembles to the students in Singapore but had less self-efficacy than Australia (Brown, Abdallah, and Ng, 2000). An explanation of the difference between the self-efficacy among students could be the reliance on self-expression or expressiveness which supports formal and modest forms upon the virtue of being humble and less demanding from life in general (Komarraju *et al.*, 2007).

Relationship between Student Academic Procrastination and Self-Efficacy

It was concluded that there is a relationship between academic procrastination and the student self-efficacy. This finding resemblance to what has been found by Steel (2007) which consider self-regulated learning ability among student to influence the student procrastination behaviour. The similar findings also found in other studies (see Balkis, 2011; Wolters, 2003; Rabin, Fogel, & Nutter-Upahm, 2011; Ferrari, Parker, & Ware, 1992). It implies that the student self-efficacy has something to do with the procrastination behaviour among students. The ability to self-regulate will ensure the willingness of the student to perform and excel in their academic life.

Relationship between Procrastination and Student Academic Achievement

It is an interesting finding to see that there was no relationship between student procrastination behaviour and their academic achievement. Contradicted to a study by Steel (2007) this finding however implies a very interesting question of how the student maintain their academic achievements though they tend to procrastinate in their academic life. In explaining this Chu & Choi (2005) argue that procrastination does not affect all students equally. It is proven from Day *et al.* (2000) study where severe academic procrastination of the students does not seem to negatively affect by their severe academic procrastination.

In a simple explanation it appears that the procrastination behaviour is the opponent process of self-regulated learning which only occurs when the student is unable to regulate his/her own learning. One other explanation we should say that the student's academic achievement based not as much on their ability to self-regulate their learning but rather based on cramming and last minute preparations.

Such a problem of cramming and last minute success preparations are quite common among students (Memon, 2007).

As such there may be people who procrastinate and have no problem with this habit as they may be able to control it at some point in time. On the other hand, there might be some procrastinators who feel catastrophic when they can't seem to do work as they want because of procrastination (Chu & Choi, 2005).

The present study tried to explore the relationships between academic procrastination, student self-efficacy and academic achievement among university students in Malaysia. Based on the findings four major recommendations are presented as follows:

1. Every student should aware of their academic behaviour such as procrastination and its effect to their academic life in the university.
2. Self-efficacy towards academic is found to be critical in influencing students learning behaviour. As such the lecturers should ensure for the students to develop positive self-efficacy which can influence their academic behaviours.
3. In many ways these two variables such as procrastination and self-efficacy does affect the student academic performance. Somehow or rather these variables will influence the students learning in both directly or indirectly.
4. For future researches it is suggested for the study to apply mixed-method design which considers both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. By combining these approaches presumably the actual phenomena of academic procrastination among university students can be explored comprehensively.

Conclusion

It appears that the student self-efficacy effect the tendency to procrastinate in their academic activities especially in an indirect manner. However, it is interesting to note that their behaviour to procrastinate in their academic activities does not have much impact on the academic achievement. In other words there are also other factors which influence the student achievement in their study. Regardless of the culture and practices it is believed that the student self-efficacy indirectly no matter how whether they are procrastinate or otherwise influence the university students academic life at the university.

It seems common to highlight that in the student's university life there are many factors which directly or indirectly influence their academic performance. Pertaining to the student academic performance if there is an effort for improvement the consideration on how the student involvement in the study is crucial. It is evidence to say that the high academic self-efficacy among student will influence their self-determination to embark in their study. This is because the student self-regulation is very much depended on the student self-efficacy. It is hoped by this finding the research on the student's academic life in the university is well informed.

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