

Influence of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students

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ABSTRACT

Procrastination is a rampant problem faced by a significant proportion of the student population and has adverse effects on academic achievement and various life outcomes. A deeper understanding of procrastination behaviours suggests toward several emotional correlates as factors underlying procrastination tendencies as opposed to the commonly held notions which explain procrastination as failures surrounding self-discipline and time management. The aim of the current study was to understand the influence of emotional intelligence on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The study was conducted on 365 female undergraduate and postgraduate students. Data was gathered using the 'Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale' and the 'Academic Procrastination Scale'. Two-Way ANOVA was run on the scores obtained to study the influence of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination. Consistent with some previous findings, the findings of the current study suggest that emotional intelligence has a significant influence on academic procrastination among students. However, no significant differences in the influence were found between the two groups implying that the influence of emotional intelligence on academic procrastination does not depend on the level of education.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Academic Procrastination, University Students, Education*

Fostering meaningful and effective educational experiences as well as facilitating better academic achievement requires an understanding of the problems associated with student-life and students' counterproductive behaviours. In India, approximately 34.6 million people were enrolled in higher education programs in the year 2015-16 while the gross enrolment ratio in higher education was 25.4 % for the age group of 18-23 years (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2016). Considering that a substantial proportion of the student population falls under the age range of 18-23 years, it is imperative to understand and analyse the problems faced by them and the factors that influence their academic performance and achievement in order to effectively tackle academic issues.

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Procrastination being a ubiquitous problem among students of different educational backgrounds necessitates a better understanding of the factors influencing it. Derived from the Latin word '*procrastinare*', which literally means to put off or postpone until another day (DeSimone, 1993), 'procrastination' is defined as, "unnecessarily postponing or avoiding tasks that must be completed" (Schraw, Wadkins & Olafson, 2007). Research suggests that between 60-95% of college students engage in procrastination behaviours (Ellis & Knaus, 1997; Steel, 2007; Wang, He & Li, 2013) and it affects about 15-20% of adults in the general population (Harriott & Ferrari, 1996). Academic procrastination has been defined as "an irrational tendency to delay at the beginning or completion of an academic task (Ackerman & Gross, 2005). It refers to "postponing academic duties such as preparing for exams and delaying homework sometimes or constantly" (Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami, 1986). Procrastination can manifest itself through various means such as watching TV, reading, sleeping, online gaming and online chatting (Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000; Thatcher, Wretschko, & Fridjhon, 2008).

Problems associated with academic procrastination include low achievement of students, increased physical and psychological problems (Ferrari & Pychyl, 2008), anxiety (Lay, 1995) and psychological distress (Rice, Richardson & Clark., 2012). Research shows that students who procrastinate have higher state anxiety levels (Haycock, McCarthy & Skay, 1998). Feelings of guilt and shame are commonly reported by those who engage in procrastination (Blunt & Pychyl, 2005; Fee & Tangney, 2000). Research with both student and adult populations provide support for the notion that stress can play a mediating factor between procrastination and poor health outcomes (Sirois, 2007; Sirois, Melia-Gordon & Pychyl, 2003). Tice and Baumeister (1997) found that students who procrastinated reported good health and low levels of stress in the beginning of the semester and increased anxiety and negative health by the end of the semester. Research findings also support a negative correlation between grade point average and procrastination (Wesley, 1994). The positive emotions derived immediately after procrastinating are short-lived and in the long-term, procrastination can lead to negative consequences. Thus, it can be rightly concluded that procrastination is a maladaptive behaviour and efforts to reduce it must be made at an individual, as well as institutional level for students.

The causal correlates of procrastination can be distinguished as either focusing on emotional attributes or factors that are not directly related to emotions such as self-regulation (Anderson, 2001) or time management (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993). Procrastination has been looked at as the lack of self-regulated performance (Senécal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995). Self-regulation refers to the ways in which one uses internal or external cues to determine when to initiate, maintain and terminate goal-directed behaviour (Lee, 2005). There is growing evidence suggesting emotional correlates of procrastination. Among the myriad of factors influencing procrastination, previous studies have found academic procrastination to be correlated with factors such as task aversiveness (Pychyl et al., 2000), fear of failure, irrational cognition, depression, anxiety (Soloman & Rothblum, 1984) self-esteem, (Senécal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995), perfectionism (Rice et. al., 2012), conscientiousness and neuroticism (Lee, Kelly, & Edwards, 2006; Milgram & Tenne, 2000; Schouwenburg & Lay, 1993; van Eerde, 2003; Kaur, 2018) and self-compassion (Sirois, 2014) among many other factors. Motivation also heavily influences procrastination (van Eerde, 2003; Klassen et al., 2010). Closely related to perfectionism and fear of failure is the tendency to avoid negative feedback which can create motivation problems which in turn influence procrastination. Parenting styles also tend to influence procrastination tendencies

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in children (Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami, 1986; Pychyl, Coplan & Reid., 2002) in that authoritarian parenting leads to more procrastination. The explanation for this lies in the premise that children whose parents are critical and demanding tend to avoid rather than risk failure. It has been found that self-esteem could play a mediating role between parenting style and procrastination (Pychyl, Coplan & Reid., 2002).

Another perspective on procrastination conceptualises it as being an emotion regulation strategy that serves to provide short-term mood repair (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). According to this conceptualisation, procrastination can be viewed as a product of task avoidance in response to emotional distress. It implies that one engages in this maladaptive mechanism for short-lived pleasures and overlooks the larger negative consequences of the behaviour that are to follow. Tice and Bratslavsky (2000) argue that engagement in mood regulation in the short-term results in failure of self-control in other areas of one's life. Experimental research (Tice, Bratslavsky & Baumeister, 2001; Pychyl et al., 2000; Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000) serves as evidence supporting the strong association between emotional regulation and procrastination. Thus, it can be hypothesized that emotions and regulation of emotions are significant contributing factors of procrastination even among students. Emotional regulation is defined as, "The processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions." (Gross, 1998). Since regulation of one's emotions is a key factor defining emotional intelligence, it can be argued that differences in emotional intelligence can contribute to differences in procrastination. In other words, emotional intelligence can influence procrastination behaviours. With this perspective, the current study focuses on emotional intelligence as a factor influencing academic procrastination along with looking at differences that may occur due to the students' level of education.

Emotional intelligence is the "ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It is an individual's ability to understand, feel, administer, and guide his/her own or others' emotions (Goleman, 1995). A revolutionary study on emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) found that emotional intelligence was four times more influential than cognitive intelligence in determining professional success even in jobs requiring advanced levels of cognitive abilities.

The significance of emotional intelligence in achieving successful outcomes in life has been well established. Ongoing research indicates toward various correlates between emotional intelligence and various life outcomes. Given the relevance of the problem of procrastination among students, immense research has been conducted examining its effects on academic outcomes and the probable causal correlates. Although some studies examining the influence of emotional intelligence on academic procrastination have been conducted (Guo et al., 2019; Eckert et al., 2016; Hen & Goroshit, 2014; Kamran & Fatima, 2013; Heward, 2010; Engin, 2009), the review of literature shows some inconsistencies in the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic procrastination. Additionally, very few studies have been conducted to examine procrastination among postgraduate students (Wang, He & Li, 2013) and there is a dearth of studies examining the difference in the relationship of emotional intelligence and academic procrastination among graduate and undergraduate students. Moreover, most of the literature has been established from a western perspective. To bridge this gap and address the inconsistencies that exist in the previous literature, the present study focuses on examining the interaction of emotional intelligence and level of

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education on academic procrastination in the Indian context. The study aims to further the understanding of procrastination behaviours among undergraduate and postgraduate students and highlight the differences, if any, that may exist between the two groups.

METHODOLOGY

Hypotheses

1. Emotional intelligence has a significant influence on academic procrastination.
2. There is an interaction effect of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination.

Sample

The study was conducted on Indian undergraduate and postgraduate students currently pursuing their studies in Indian cities. A total of 365 (143 undergraduate, 222 postgraduate) female students from different educational backgrounds (Pure Sciences, Engineering, Commerce and Arts) constitute the sample of the current study. Data was collected using non-random convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. Non-English-speaking students, male students, married students, working students (full time or part time), Indian students studying abroad, students below 18 years and above 24 years and students pursuing graduate/postgraduate diplomas were excluded from the current sample.

Tools for Data Collection

1. **Socio Demographic Data Sheet.** Participants were asked to fill in a socio demographic data sheet seeking information such as their name, age, gender, marital status, family income, educational qualification, stream of education, current working status and place of living.
2. **Academic Procrastination Scale (2019).** Developed by Savita Gupta and Liyaqat Bashir, the Academic Procrastination Scale consists of 30 items divided into four dimensions—I. Time Management, II. Task Aversiveness, III. Sincerity, IV. Personal Initiative. It was administered on 460 University Students including both Undergraduates & Post Graduates. The scale has high internal consistency (.889). The convergent validity of academic procrastination scale ranges from .657 to .731. Content validity of the scale was established using the process of expert review (Bashir & Gupta, 2019).
3. **Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (1998).** The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale has been developed based on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence. It is a 33-item scale measuring emotional intelligence on the following dimensions: Perception of Emotions, Managing Own Emotions, Managing Others' Emotions and Utilization of Emotions. The scale uses a 5 point Likert scale response format. The internal consistency of the scale was found to be .90 and test-retest reliability was found to be .78. Various studies have established good convergent and divergent validity for the scale (Schutte, Malouff & Bhullar, 2009).

Procedure

The study aimed at examining the behaviour of college students. Thus, various educational institutions in Bengaluru fulfilling the required criteria were approached with the goal of obtaining participants. The required permissions and consent from these institutions was obtained along with consent from the individual participants. Institution heads as well as participants were briefed regarding the study. Individuals that were willing to participate and also fulfilled the criteria required for the study were asked to fill in the sociodemographic

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sheet as well as the questionnaires. A google form consisting of the socio-demographic data sheet and the two scales was circulated among those living outside of Bengaluru.

The completed questionnaires were scored and interpreted as per the instructions of the scales used for the study. Only those data that were found to fulfil the requirements of the study were analysed. The SPSS software was used for the statistical analysis of the obtained data. The statistical technique used was Two- way ANOVA (2x3) to study the main effects and interaction effect of the independent variables (emotional intelligence, level of education) on the dependent variable (academic procrastination).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 Levene's test for homogeneity of variance

| F | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|-------|-----|-----|------|
| 1.590 | 5 | 359 | .162 |

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

Table 1 shows that the variances among the groups are equal ($F=1.590, p=.162$) and the null hypothesis is retained. Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variance required for parametric analysis was met by the sample.

Table 2 ANOVA analysis for main effects and interaction effect

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model | 8058.493 ^a | 5 | 1611.699 | 7.026 | .000 | .089 |
| Intercept | 1470464.936 | 1 | 1470464.936 | 6410.692 | .000 | .947 |
| Emotional Intelligence | 6377.565 | 2 | 3188.783 | 13.902 | .000 | .072 |
| Level of Education | 37.468 | 1 | 37.468 | .163 | .686 | .000 |
| Emotional Intelligence * Level of Education | 570.304 | 2 | 285.152 | 1.243 | .290 | .007 |
| Error | 82346.318 | 359 | 229.377 | | | |
| Total | 2644553.000 | 365 | | | | |
| Corrected Total | 90404.811 | 364 | | | | |

a. R Squared = .089 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

Table 2 shows that emotional intelligence has a significant influence of academic procrastination ($F=13.902, p=.000$). The results for the same are significant at the 0.01 level. Results obtained indicate no significant influence of level of education on academic procrastination ($F=.163, p=.686$). Similarly, results pertaining to the interaction effect of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination were not found to be significant ($F=1.243, p=.290$).

Table 3 Post hoc analysis for levels of emotional intelligence

| | (I) Emotional Intelligence | (J) Emotional Intelligence | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|-----------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Tukey HSD | Average | High | 7.03* | 2.123 | .003 |
| | | Low | -8.32* | 2.309 | .001 |
| | High | Average | -7.03* | 2.123 | .003 |
| | | Low | -15.35* | 2.828 | .000 |
| | Low | Average | 8.32* | 2.309 | .001 |
| | | High | 15.35* | 2.828 | .000 |

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Table 3 shows the post hoc analysis for emotional intelligence and academic procrastination. Post hoc analysis indicates that there is a significant difference in academic procrastination between all three groups. The results obtained pertaining to the difference in academic procrastination of average and high intelligence groups ($z=7.03$ $p=.003$), average and low emotional intelligence groups ($z=8.32$, $p=.001$) and between high and low emotional intelligence groups ($z=15.35$, $p=.000$) are significant at the 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to study the influence of emotional intelligence as well as its interaction with level of education on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The research study addressed the following research questions (1) Does emotional intelligence have an influence on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate female students? (2) Is there an interaction effect of emotional intelligence and educational level on academic procrastination? The study was conducted on a sample of 365 female students between 18-24 years currently pursuing either under-graduation or post-graduation.

The first objective of the study was to examine the influence of emotional intelligence on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The findings of the study (Tables 2 & 3) reveal that emotional intelligence significantly influences academic procrastination. Procrastination is found to be higher among students with low emotional intelligence. These findings are consistent with previous research supporting this relationship (eg. Heward, 2010; Engin, 2009; Eckert et al, 2016). Regulation of emotions is a crucial component of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). People with low emotional intelligence may find it difficult to regulate their emotions and may prioritise immediate and temporary mood-repair over long-term negative consequences of procrastinating such as missed deadlines, poor quality work, lower grades or higher levels of stress. Negative emotions and ruminating thoughts may take precedence over rational thinking more often among those with lower emotional intelligence as compared to their counterparts. Tasks that are perceived to be difficult or beyond the individual's capacity may lead to the experience of negative emotions which cannot be easily regulated owing to lower levels of emotional intelligence. Thus, procrastination can be understood as the result of failure to effectively prioritise and regulate emotions in the given situation.

The third objective of the study was to examine the interaction of emotional intelligence and educational level on academic procrastination. Results obtained indicate that the corresponding hypothesis 'there is an interaction effect of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination' is not retained. Emotional intelligence does not interact with the level of education in its influence on academic procrastination thus establishing that emotional intelligence plays a role in influencing procrastination among students irrespective of their level of education. Although research indicates toward a negative relationship between age and procrastination (Cao, 2012) as well as level of education (Steel & Ferrari, 2013; He, 2017) and procrastination, the findings of the current study provide evidence that despite this trend, the influence of emotional intelligence on the tendency to procrastinate remains unaffected. This further implies the significance emotional intelligence holds at all age levels.

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Significant Findings

The primary finding of the study is that emotional intelligence significantly influences academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students in that students with low emotional intelligence tend to procrastinate more as compared to those with high emotional intelligence. The basis for these findings are grounded in previous literature which shows that emotional states such as depression and anxiety (Soloman & Rothblum, 1984; Spada, Hiou & Nikcevic, 2006) and emotional regulation (Senécal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995; Eckert et al, 2016) are found to influence procrastination. Results also indicate that the influence of emotional intelligence on academic procrastination does not depend on the level of education, that is, emotional intelligence significantly influences procrastination among students irrespective of their level of education.

Implications of the Study

The study aids in the understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic procrastination among students. Besides adding to the pre-existing literature on the various outcomes and correlates of emotional intelligence, findings of the study indicate that emotional intelligence has a significant influence on academic procrastination among students and this influence is constant among undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. This implies that improving emotional intelligence can prove to be beneficial in decreasing procrastination among students, thus increasing productivity and overall academic achievement. Tackling the problem of procrastination can ensure that the quality of work of students is not compromised due to time constraints thereby leading to better learning outcomes. The study exemplifies the importance of emotional intelligence in the academic setting. Further, these findings have implications for educators as well as counsellors to look into matters relating to emotions when dealing with procrastination behaviours of students rather than only looking at factors related to time-management, self-discipline and the like. Interventions aimed at reducing procrastination must consider emotions as an important aspect underlying procrastination.

Limitations

The findings of the study need to be interpreted with great caution owing to its limitations. The most significant limitation of the study is that the study was carried out amidst the COVID-19 pandemic which could have had an impact on the participants' responses to the questionnaires. Another limitation was the unequal distribution of the sample in terms of the streams of education considered for the study with the sample largely consisting of students of the arts and humanities in addition to the unequal distribution of the number of postgraduate and undergraduate respondents. The sample of the study was also limited to female students.

CONCLUSION

Consistent with the review of literature (Engin et al, 2009; Heward et al, 2010; Hen & Goroshit, 2014; Eckert et al, 2016), the results of the study indicate that emotional intelligence has a significant influence on academic procrastination among postgraduate and undergraduate students. The results are significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, the hypothesis stating that 'emotional intelligence will have a significant influence on academic procrastination among undergraduate and postgraduate students' was retained. Results indicate no significant interaction effect between emotional intelligence and level of education on academic procrastination of students. Thus, the hypothesis stating that 'there is a significant interaction effect of emotional intelligence and level of education on academic

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procrastination among students' is rejected and the null hypothesis is retained. Overall, the findings of the study suggest that academic procrastination among students decreases with an increase in emotional intelligence across undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Scope for Further Studies

Future studies can be conducted on a larger sample including males and equal distribution among educational streams ensuring equal representation of various courses differing in nature. Studies may also be conducted to see if interventions targeted at improving emotional intelligence are successful in reducing procrastination among students. Further, regression studies can be conducted to understand how much of an influence other factors closely related to emotional intelligence such as self-compassion, self-forgiveness as well as the various components of emotional intelligence have on academic procrastination. Future research may also focus on the understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and different kinds of procrastination. Studies comparing emotional and non-emotional correlates of procrastination may be conducted to find out which of the two categories contributes more toward the tendency to procrastinate.

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Conflict of Interest

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