

Personality traits, Self-Esteem and Academic Procrastination in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the link between personality traits, self-esteem and academic procrastination among university students in Cameroon. Participants are 291 students to whom three scales have been administered: the French version of the Big Five personality Inventory scale (Plaisant et al., 2010), the academic procrastination scale (Ghazal, 2012) and Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale. The survey was conducted both online via the Google Forms platform, and by administering the physical questionnaires. The results indicate that academic procrastination is significantly and negatively correlated with the personality factors of conscientiousness and openness to experience. On the other hand, the relation with neuroticism is positive and average. As for self-esteem, it is negatively correlated with academic procrastination. These results are among the first on the phenomenon in Cameroon and corroborate the conclusions of certain studies while differing from several others. Research perspectives are subsequently considered.

Keywords: *Personality traits, Self-esteem, Academic Procrastination, Cameroon*

Procrastination is a transgenerational and universal phenomenon and an important research interest for many scholars (Burka & Yuen, 2008; Pychyl, 2013; Steel, 2007). Pychyl (2013) defines procrastination as a voluntary postponement of a targeted action, despite the knowledge that this postponement can have a negative impact on the performance of the individual and on his feelings. The author emphasizes that procrastination is willful and unnecessary delay, which differs from useful willful delay, which cannot be procrastination. This clarification already indicates the compromising nature of procrastination, which can even lead to serious damage in the lives of individuals. Burka and Yuen (2008) show that the harmful effects of procrastination range from reduced performance to general malaise. However, research has not been limited to understanding procrastination from a general perspective.

As stated by Huteau (1985), any behavior being the results of a set of lower-level behaviors implemented in an organized manner, explaining academic procrastination would bring out

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all the other behaviors likely to underlie it. For this, various factors are studied in order to determine the origin of this phenomenon. From environmental factors (Afzal & Jami, 2018; Naturil-Alfonso et al., 2018) to personality factors (Osiurak et al. 2015; Sénécal et al., 1995). Among these factors, many studies have focused on the intersection of personality traits, self-esteem and academic procrastination following the example of Vijay and Kadhiraivan (2016). This study tries to bring evidence from Africa, where the phenomenon is less investigated. The objective is to analyze the relationship between personality traits, self-esteem and academic procrastination among university students.

Academic procrastination

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) define procrastination as unnecessarily delaying tasks to the point of feeling subjective discomfort. The latter can cause several consequences. In addition, Fernandez (2015), asserts that in procrastination, the individual intends to perform the task before it is postponed while for avoidance, the individual has as a primary intention to postpone late. Likewise, he points out that procrastination is not the right word when it comes to strategic postponement, because it involves rationality. In this perspective, we want to differentiate our research theme from an approach to procrastination that is intended to be dichotomous (Choi & Moran, 2009): the passive one illustrating dysfunctional procrastination such as Pychyl (2013), Burka and Yuen (2008), Ghazal (2012) see it and the other active implying a rationality in postponement (Chu & Choi, 2005). In this study, we will approach academic procrastination in a dysfunctional way. The consequences of procrastination are felt both psychologically and academically. Academic performance declines, failure follows, dropping out of school and fears surface, etc. This harmfulness has led to several studies investigating the dispositional origins of academic procrastination.

They also focused on its manifestations in the academic life of students. In 2007, estimates of academic procrastination revealed that 75% of students procrastinate, and 50% of them admit to procrastinating very often while seeing it as a problem (Burka & Yuen, 2008). The phenomenon seems to be on rise (Steel, 2007) even if Abu-Ghazal (2012) indicated that procrastination in university students has reached 25%. Salomon and Rothblum (1984) measured academic procrastination through specific tasks as 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. They found that students more often procrastinate when writing term paper (46%) than when doing others tasks. Several research studies have focused on the causes of academic procrastination. They reveal the existence of a multitude of causes such as the aversiveness of the task, the fear failure, difficulties with self-regulation, lack of assertion, poor time management, personality traits, the use of internet (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Vijay & Kadhiraivan, 2016; Afzal & Jami, 2018; Sénécal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995; Mohammadi et al. 2015). The consequences of academic procrastination range from decreased performance, feelings of disappointment and guilt, and life dissatisfaction (Joubert, 2015; Özer & Saçkes, 2015).

Personality traits and academic procrastination

Personality is a stable and individualized unit of a set of behaviors (Huteau, 1985), a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person's behavior (Feist & Feist, 2008). Personality can be studied in all human beings because certain integrating mechanisms are universal and differential (Huteau, 1985). Personality traits are a lasting characteristic, the disposition to behave in a particular way in various situations (Hansenne, 2003). The personality trait makes it possible to differentiate the behaviors of individuals, to ensure the consistency and stability of these

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behaviors over time (Feist and Feist, 2008). The personality traits play three functions: the stability of the personality over time; the differentiation of people from one another; the differentiation of intra-personal behavior through various life situations. The traits approach, a dispositional approach, is the most used to identify behavior. Among the theories underlying the latter, the largest and most renowned is that of the Big Five, which states that individual differences can be divided into five major dimensions (Hansenne, 2003).

Several studies have shown that there is a relationship between Big Five personality traits and academic procrastination (Vijay & Kadiravan, 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Ghanadi et al., 2017). Research on personality traits and academic procrastination have yielded varying results. It is established that the link between neuroticism and academic procrastination refers to a positive correlation (Kim et al., 2017; Ghanadi et al., 2017). Impulsivity is a facet of neuroticism and the main determinant of procrastination (Steel, 2007). This is surely due to the fact that impulsive people are unable to control their wants and needs, so they quickly turn to what gives them immediate satisfaction. Another cause of procrastination is the preference for immediate rewards over long-term ones (Pychyl, 2013). Neuroticism is even considered by Kadiravan and Vijay (2016) to be the most important trait that affects academic procrastination. However, Varma (2017), in his study, did not find a significant link between neuroticism and academic procrastination.

Some studies show that conscientiousness is negatively correlated with academic procrastination and may not lead to it (Kim & al. 2016; Ghanadi et al. 2017). At the same time, Steel (2007) notes that a low level of conscientiousness is a factor of procrastination. Procrastination is synonymous with irresponsibility, lack of planning, lack of self-control while conscientiousness is the opposite. In short, the more conscientious we are, the less we procrastinate (Pychyl, 2013).

Regarding the extraversion dimension, a person with a high score is in principle sociable and active, tends to engage in multiple activities, and is therefore prone to academic procrastination (Huus, 2015; Swaraswati et al. (2017) On the other hand, studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between extraversion and academic procrastination. In line with this, Kim et al. (2017) found that extroverted individuals are not predisposed to academic procrastination. and that if ever they postpone until tomorrow, it is to better organize their activity. Unlike these researchers, Varma (2017) in his study discovered that there is no link between extraversion and academic procrastination.

Other traits such as agreeableness and openness to experience are also found to be related to academic procrastination. Convenience has a negative correlation with academic procrastination. Indeed, people with a high score in agreeableness might not procrastinate because they are concerned about others who would depend on the task at hand (Kim et al., 2017). As for openness to experience, it has no connection with academic procrastination (Swaraswati et al., 2017, Varma, 2017).

Many studies associate personal and situational factors with procrastination in general and in academia in particular (Vijay & Khadiravan, 2016; Hajloo, 2014; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Its prevalence in the West makes it a major research focus (Burka & Yuen, 2008). Data relating to African realities are almost non-existent for a phenomenon which nevertheless constitutes a nuisance to academic life.

Self-esteem and academic procrastination

Self-esteem is mostly associated with personality. For Beaumeister (2005), self-esteem is how people value themselves. On the other hand, Rosenberg 1965, cited by Abdel-Khalek (2016), defines self-esteem as positive self-assessment. He also adds that high self-esteem is the fact that an individual respects himself and sees himself as someone of worth. According to the literature, self-esteem has positive effects and negative effects depending on whether it is high or low (Leary, 1999). Regarding the positive effects of high self-esteem, this is an important factor in mental well-being. Individuals with a high score are happier, more optimistic and more motivated, are resistant to difficulties, it helps to self-regulate and is an important part of social success. Conversely, those with a low score are more anxious, more pessimistic, depressed, are prone to discomfort, have poor academic performance.

As for self-esteem, its relationship to academic procrastination has also been the subject of much research. It significantly influences the accomplishment of activities. Individuals with a high score for procrastination, precisely because it is a real problem for them, also have low self-esteem (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Low self-esteem explains academic procrastination (Osiurak et al. 2015). The people concerned handicap themselves by each time finding excuses to delay an activity (Pychyl, 2013). A contrary and surprising result was obtained by Tamini et al. (2013) who instead reveal that self-esteem and academic procrastination have a significantly positive correlation. Their work shows that academic procrastination increases with self-esteem. This singular result was explained by the effects of Iranian collectivist culture. For the rest, it has been shown that a student with better self-esteem is less prone to academic procrastination (Vijay & Kadhivaran, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Our study involved a total of 291 participants made up of students, 134 of whom were male and 157 females. 233 participants came from public institutions and 58 from private institutions of higher education in the city of Yaounde. These students came from the classes of Bachelor degree 2 (146), Bachelor degree 3 (56), Master 1 (40), Master 2 (46), and Doctorate (3). The age ranges from 17 to 42 years old. The mean age is 22.87 with a standard deviation of 4.027. Students self-rated as: among the top 5% (n = 29; or 10%); among the top 10% (n = 23; or 7.9%); among the top 25% (n = 42; or 14.4%); among the top 50% (n = 108; or 37.1%); among the top 75% (n = 71; or 24.4%); among the top 100% (n = 14; or 4.8%). The weighted average of the sample, in terms of results out of 4 at the end of the previous academic year, is 2.52, with a standard deviation of 0.371. The smallest score is 1.8 and the highest is 4.

Instruments

For this study, we used a set of tools consisting of an academic procrastination scale by Abu Ghazal (2012), a self-esteem scale by Rosenberg (1965), a French Big Five scale (BFI-Fr) by Plaisant et al. (2010).

The Abu-Ghazal Academic Procrastination Scale (2012)

It was developed by Abu-Ghazal (2012) to measure academic procrastination among Jordanian students. It consists of a series of 21 items, 8 of which are inverted, and whose corresponding responses on the Likert scale range from 1="describes me very weakly" to 5="describes me very strongly". This scale includes items such as "I finish my homework before the deadline" and "I postpone my homework even if it is important without justifiable

reasons". Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is 0.90. 1. The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is 0.90. 1.

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (1965)

This scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965) and consists of 10 items with responses ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 4= "strongly agree" with items such as "I think I have a number of qualities" and "I sometimes think I am a good-for-nothing". This scale also includes 5 inverted items. It consists of evaluating overall self-esteem.

The scale of the French Big Five BFI-Fr of Plaisant et al. (2010)

It is a scale translated and adapted into french by Plaisant et al. (2010) from the original American Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John et al. (2008). In its French version, it includes one item more than the American version, with a total of 45 items. Responses on the Likert scale range from 1= "strongly disapprove" to 5= "approve to strongly approve" including items such as "I see myself as someone who is talkative" and "I see myself as someone who is effective in his or her work". This scale has 17 inverted items. It measures personality through five major dimensions: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neurosis, and openness to experience, for which Cronbach's alpha is respectively 0.82; 0.75; 0.80; 0.82; 0.74. The one-dimensional score is the average of the sum of the scores of the items in that dimension.

A pilot survey of 36 students made it possible to test the data collection tools. The reliability tests are considered satisfactory on the whole. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.813 for the Abu-Ghazal Academic Procrastination Scale (2012), 0.711 for Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (1965) and 0.604 for the French Big Five BFI-Fr of Plaisant et al. (2010). We carried out two types of questionnaires due to the constraints relating to the corona virus pandemic. One was done online using Google Forms and the other physically, accidentally reaching out to students they encountered on campus anyway.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 24 software. The scoring technique was applied to calculate the values of each participant on the different scales and in all their dimensions. hypothetical values were then determined to categorize respondents based on their scores. For the Academic Procrastination Scale, student scores were categorized as follows: low <2.50; medium 2.50 to 3.49; and high from 3.50. For the self-esteem scale, we have: low <2.00; average from 2.00 to 2.49; and raised from 3 to more. That of the Big Five, corresponds to: low <2.50; medium 2.50 to 3.49; and and high from 3.50. And finally, we used the Bravais Pearson correlation test to establish the relationship between personality traits, self-esteem, and academic procrastination.

RESULTS

Table No.1 Results on procrastination

Academic procrastination	Frequency	Percentage
Low (< 2,50)	106	36,
Medium (2,50 - 3,49)	143	49,1
High (3,50+)	42	14,4
Total	291	100,0

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Table 1 shows that out of 291 participants, there is a frequency of 106 with a percentage of 36.4% for the "Low" degree (< 2.50), a frequency of 143 with a percentage of 49.1% for the "Medium" degree (2.50 - 3.49), and finally, a frequency of 42 with a percentage of 14.4 for the "High" degree (3.50+). The "Medium" degree (2.50 - 3.49) having a high frequency of 143.

Concerning the relationship between demographic variables and academic procrastination, results are showing that female students ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.59$) and male students ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.63$) have similar procrastination scores ($t = -0.358$; $df = 289$; $p = 0.721$). Academic procrastination is not varying according to the students' level of study ($F_{(3; 287)} = 0.894$; $p = 0.445$). The relationship between age and academic procrastination is not significant ($r = -0.06$; $p = 0.31$). Procrastination scores vary depending on the grade obtained in the previous academic year ($F_{(2; 284)} = 4.67$; $p < 0.01$). However, only students with a "good" rating achieve the highest procrastination scores. They are only 3 in the sample. For others, procrastination scores do not depend on the grade obtained. The assessment of academic performance by category does not indicate any significant difference in academic procrastination ($F_{(5; 281)} = 0.472$; $p = 0.797$). In other words, no matter whether they are in the top 5% or in others categories, they procrastinate the same way. The non-significant correlation between the weighted averages and the academic procrastination scores confirms this reality ($r = 0.056$; $p = 0.348$).

Table No. 2 Correlation Matrix

		M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Dimension E (Extraversion. Energy and Enthusiasm)	3.0503	0.69759	0.088	.115*	-.229**	.202**	.283**	-0.032
2	Dimension A (Pleasantness. Altruism and Affection)	4.0351	0.57254		.178**	-.277**	.115*	.174**	-0.096
3	Dimension C (Conscience. Control. Constraint)	3.4754	0.67139			-.463**	.339**	.311**	-.435**
4	Dimension N (Negative Emotions. Neuroticism. Nervousness)	2.6761	0.67874				-.222**	-.464**	.298**
5	Dimension O (Openness. Originality. Openness)	3.646	0.58969					.222**	-.173**
6	Self esteem	3.1089	0.46675						-.158**
7	Academic Procrastination	2.7761	0.61028						

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

As a reminder, extraversion measures the intensity of interpersonal interaction, level of activity, need for stimulation, and the ability to have fun. A high-scoring individual is sociable, upbeat, fun loving, affectionate, and ambitious. While the one whose score is low is reserved, not very demonstrative, distant, focused on the task, and discreet.

Convenience measures the quality of an individual's interpersonal focus along a continuum, compassion, feelings and actions. One with a high score is compassionate, easy-going, confident, helpful, forgiving, gullible, and outspoken. While the one with a low score is cynical, rude, suspicious, uncooperative, vindictive, ruthless, and irritable.

Through conscientiousness, one assesses the degree of organization, perseverance and motivation in the behavior of the goal-oriented individual. A person with a high score is organized, reliable, hardworking, disciplined, punctual, careful, ambitious, and persevering.

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In contrast, the one with the low score is aimless, unreliable, lazy, reckless, neglectful, faint-hearted, and hedonistic.

Neuroticism assesses adaptation versus emotional instability. The individual with the high score is nervous, emotional, anxious, depressed and maladjusted. In contrast, the individual with a low score is calm, relaxed, phlegmatic, robust, quiet and content.

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Openness to experience distinguishes people who have a need for diversification from those who like monotony. A person with a high score in this dimension is curious, creative, original, imaginative, and non-conformist. Conversely, a person with a low score is conformist, realistic, exclusive, his artistic sense is weak, and his analytical mind poorly developed.

The correlation matrix (Table 2) indicates that among the personality traits measured, only neuroticism is positively correlated with academic procrastination ($r = 0.298$; $p < 0.01$). Two traits are negatively correlated with academic procrastination. These are conscientiousness ($r = -0.435$; $p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($r = -0.173$; $p < 0.01$). In other words, academic procrastination scores vary in the same direction as neuroticism while they vary in the opposite direction of those of conscientiousness and agreeableness. The last two personality traits, extroversion ($r = -0.032$; $p = 0.582$) and pleasantness ($r = -0.096$; $p = 0.104$), appear to have no significant association with academic procrastination. Self-esteem is negatively correlated with academic procrastination ($r = -0.158$; $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Our study shows that the majority of the students obtain average score in academic procrastination. These results are almost similar to those of Abu-Ghazal (2012) where out of 751 students, 21.6% of the participants have a high degree of procrastination, 60.3% of participants have an average degree of procrastination and 18.1% have a low degree of academic procrastination.

The majority of study participants' scores are average in academic procrastination. The phenomenon may therefore constitute a center of interest in Africa. It is viewed differently depending on the personality traits. Extroverted students characterized by being warm, full of positive emotions, thrill-seeking, do not seem to have a definite procrastination profile. Their scores can be low, medium, or high. These results are in agreement with those of Varma (2017) in whom the correlation between extraversion and procrastination is indeed zero. However, these results contradict the research findings of Kim et al. (2016) in whom extraversion has a negative correlation with passive procrastination.

Students with a high likeability score are generally compassionate, polite, kind, helpful, and non-complaining. These are characteristics that are often not correlated with academic procrastination in the literature. This result is confirmed by studies by Varma (2017). Conversely, a study by Joubert (2015) established a negative but weak correlation.

Conscientious individuals are cautious, careful, organized, serious, and have a sense of responsibility and less prone to procrastination (Kim et al., 2016; Ghanadi et al., 2017). Our

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study confirms this trend among Cameroonian students in whom the personality trait of conscientiousness is negatively correlated with academic procrastination.

On the other hand, the scores of academic procrastination vary in them in the same direction as those of the personality trait neuroticism, which reflects a significant positive correlation. These results are also corroborated by those of Ghanadi et al. (2017), and Kim et al. (2017). Indeed, the trait of neuroticism is characterized by anxiety, stress, fear, and psychological distress. Affected students tend to avoid stressful activities, which is why they are more likely to procrastinate academically. As observed by Solomon and Rothblum (1984), this result highlights task aversity and fear that are intimately linked to procrastinating behavior. Our study also shows that academic procrastination has a negative and significant relationship with openness to experience, in agreement with the results already obtained by Swaraswati et al. (2017). Indeed, the openness to experience trait is characterized by the spirit of creativity, a great imagination, and curiosity. These character traits tend not to be positively related to academic procrastination.

Self-esteem is also negatively correlated with academic procrastination depending on the results we achieved in our study. They show that the more self-esteem increases, the more academic procrastination decreases. Indeed, it is assumed that the student with high self-esteem is confident, believes in his abilities, is independent, self-worth and is less inclined to procrastinate. Our results corroborate those of Hajloo (2014), Vijay and Kadiravan (2016). For Solomon & Rothblum (1984), individuals with high procrastination scores and for whom procrastination is a problem suffer from low self-esteem and avoid prominent stains such as classroom presentations.

CONCLUSION

This study is one of the first to examine academic procrastination in black Africa and promises interesting perspectives for research and intervention in counseling for the benefit of students. If the personality variables have been highlighted, the fact remains that questioning the relationship to the local environment of the academic procrastination of the African student remains a line of thought to be explored. Tools measuring academic procrastination can also be adapted to the African context and also serve as psychometric tools for diagnosing and supporting clients.

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Conflict of Interest

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