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## **Procrastination in daily academic tasks and its relationship to self-esteem among university students**

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**Abstract**--Procrastination in daily academic tasks is a popular and complex phenomenon that can be influenced by several factors including self-esteem. The current study seeks to explore the relationship between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students in Jordan. Additionally, the study aims at examining whether the participants' gender, academic level and academic specialization have significant effects on procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem. Data were collected from 240 university students in Jordan (123 male & 117 female) by administering an online survey. The study adopted a descriptive correlational approach by employing academic procrastination and self-esteem scales. Results of the study reported a low negative relationship between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem of participants. The participants reported a moderate level of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem. The level of procrastination was slightly higher than self-esteem level. Moreover, there was a significant difference in levels of procrastination and self-esteem which were attributed to gender which was in favour of male students. Finally, there were no significant differences between

procrastination and self-esteem according to academic level or academic specialization variables.

**Keywords**—procrastination, self-esteem, daily academic tasks, university students.

## Introduction

The events of our complex life witnesses many tensions, crises, and rapid developments on daily basis. These dramatic changes can lead the individual to examine ongoing stress while performing certain tasks (Kuhnel, Sonnentag, Bledow & Melchers, 2018). Furthermore, this can result in increased burdens, putting off tasks, delaying accomplishing tasks until the last minute, and failing to meet deadlines. Procrastination is one of the most complex and influential phenomenon in the individuals' performance and achievement. Thus, procrastination can have a negative effect on students' achievement, motivation and self-esteem when it results in failure to meet any work requirements, standards and deadlines (Babu, Chandra, Vanishree, and Amritha, 2019). Procrastination is known as the individual's effort of shaping one's self-organization which may lead later to failure and other negative consequence due to unreasonable delay of tasks (Prem, et al., 2018). No matter how individuals are committed and well-organized, procrastination takes place when the individuals prioritise spending hours on trivial pursuits such: shopping online, chatting, watching television and using social media platforms. Such individuals can be considered procrastinators because they should not have been frittering away that valuable time instead of investing it on working on academic tasks or duties and managing submitting their work within specific deadline (Hajloo, 2014).

Whether the individuals avoid homework assignments, ignore household chores, or putting off finishing a project for work, procrastination can have a detrimental effect on students' study, grades, motivation, satisfaction, and academic daily life (Steel, 2007). Psychologists posit that procrastination can be specifically more salient among university students compared to school students. Steel (2007) reported that university students procrastinate on daily basis, especially during the periods of completing and submitting coursework assignments and projects ahead of the end of academic terms. Hence, psychologists suggested several basic cognitive deformities that cause procrastination in daily academic life. Many students tend to exaggerate in estimating the time left for them to perform tasks, exaggerate how motivated they will be in the future, underestimate how long certain activities will take to complete, and mistakenly assume that they will be in the right frame of mind to work on a project (Alkhutaba and Al habees, 2015).

Procrastination is a complex phenomenon that can be associated with self-esteem, self-efficacy, low task value, distraction, high impulsiveness, and long delay between the start of tasks and their completion (Awwad and Alkhutaba, 2021). Students have weaknesses in enduring any negative feelings, frustration or boredom when faced with any obstacles while performing daily academic tasks. Consequently, they may surrender directly and resort to procrastination in carrying out what is needed without any justification by deciding to delay taking

actions deliberately (Gallagher, Golin & Kelleher, 1992). Furthermore, it has been posited that a certain behaviour is attributed as a form of procrastination when this decision lead to counter-productivity or when the postponement is unjustified or unnecessary. Thus, such decisions to procrastinate can result in failure to complete the planned task or project within the deadlines (Burka and Yuen, 2008). One source of procrastination is due to the failure to estimate the time needed to complete the required academic tasks. Many students devote extra days and weeks to work on some academic tasks, but they fail to complete them successfully because they underestimate the complexity of executing some of the sub-tasks resulting in failing to meet the task deadline or completing the task successfully (Gupta, Hershey, and Gaur, 2012).

### **Literature Review**

In a descriptive study, Ahmad (2021) investigated the academic procrastination level among university students in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the study was designed to examine the effect of gender and academic achievement on the level of academic procrastination of the participants. The study recruited 182 participants (142 female & 40 males) from the preparatory year of Northern Borders University. In order to collect data, the researcher adopted the Academic Procrastination Scale (Hijazi, Shawashreh & Al-rabie, 2013). The results indicated that the students' academic procrastination level was medium. Besides, there was a statistically significant effect for gender on academic procrastination level in favour of male students. However, there was no statistically significant effect for academic achievement on the participants' academic procrastination level. Babu, Chandra, Vanishree, and Amritha (2019) assessed the relationship between academic procrastination and self-esteem among dental students in Bengaluru City, Karnataka, India. The sample of the study consisted of (255) dental students. Tuckman Academic Procrastination Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale have been used for data collection. The results showed a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.25$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) between academic procrastination scores and self-esteem scores. There was a significant difference in the mean score of academic procrastination between males ( $40.81 \pm 6.87$ ) and females ( $42.80 \pm 7.25$ ) ( $P = 0.03$ ).

Sawalha and Sawalha (2018) investigated academic procrastination and self-academic concept levels among a sample of students at National Irbid University. Sample of the study consisted of (286) male and female university students. The findings indicated a moderate level of academic procrastination and self-academic concept among the participants. Statistically significant differences were found in the level of academic procrastination which are attributed to the gender of the participants. On the other hand, the results did not spot any statistically significant differences for academic procrastination based on the students' academic specialization. Furthermore, no statistically significant differences in academic self-concept level were found between the students according to their gender or GPA. Finally, the results showed a positive significant correlation between students' academic procrastination and self-academic concept levels.

In a correlational study, Khamis (2016) explored the relationship between academic procrastination and a number of meta-cognitive strategies. The sample

of the study consisted of 324 students from Al-Albait University in Jordan. The study results showed that (66.40%) of the participants have high level of academic procrastination, while (33.60%) have low level of academic procrastination. A significant difference was found in academic procrastination based on students' gender and faculty. Furthermore, result of the study revealed a statistically significant effect for academic procrastination due to the interaction between gender/faculty and age/faculty of the students. However, no significant differences effect on academic procrastination has been reported with respect to age. Finally, the results reported a negative relationship between the strategies of meta-cognition and academic procrastination.

Cerino (2014) studied the relationships between academic procrastination, self-efficacy, and academic motivation. Sample of the study consisted of (101) university students. The results reported a negative significant correlation between academic procrastination, academic motivation and general self-efficacy. Moreover, the results showed that academic motivation can be predicted by academic procrastination. However, general self-efficacy did not make a clear contribution to the model behind the variance accounted for by academic motivation. Saleem and Rafique's (2012) explored whether an association exists between procrastination and self-esteem among university students. It also aimed at finding out gender and birth order differences in procrastination and self-esteem levels. Besides collecting personal information through a self-constructed scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale and Lay Procrastination Scale were distributed to 80 university students (39 male and 41 female). The results captured only one statistically significant negative correlation between procrastination and self-esteem exists among university students.

It can be concluded that most of the previous studies posit several explanation why different psychological variables cause procrastination. According to most studies procrastination is largely affected by how the individuals think and make decisions. The studies discussed earlier found out mixed effects and relationship between procrastination and other psychological variables (e.g., self-efficacy, and academic motivation, strategies of meta-cognitive, and self-academic concept). However, there is still a paucity of studies that explored the relationship between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem of university students, particularly in the light of the individuals' variables (e.g., gender, academic level and academic specialization).

### **Problem of Study**

Academic procrastination is a common behaviour among university students. The repetition of procrastination is self-defeating behaviour, and a complex issue that needs thorough investigation in order to broaden our understanding of this complex phenomenon. Babu, Chandra, Vanishree & Amritha (2019) believe that a high level of procrastination has negative effects on academic and family life with detrimental consequences of the individuals' self-esteem and life satisfaction. However, university students adopt different thinking styles to achieve the best, and continuously search for rewards and avoid stressful and embarrassing situations. Self-esteem is considered a personal cognitive component of the students, which tries to keep the individual away from anything that causes fear

or undervalue. So, university students are likely to procrastinate while working on tasks and projects. Thus, they may feel uncomfortable resulting in negative perceptions about their abilities and limitations. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive study to find out the possible reasons and causes beyond procrastination. There is a need to explore how procrastination occurs and what negative effects it can have on university students' self-esteem and personality.

### **Aims of Study**

The current study aims to explore the nature of relationship between the procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students. The study furthered attempts to examine whether students' gender, academic level, and academic specialization interact with their level of the procrastination and self-esteem.

### **Research Questions**

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Is there a correlation between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students?
- **RQ2:** What are the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students?
- **RQ3:** What is the effect of gender, academic level, and academic specialization on levels of the procrastination and self-esteem among university students?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive research design to tackle the issue of procrastination and self-esteem. This study employed a quantitative approach to data collection by administering two scales to collect data about the participants' academic procrastination and self-esteem levels.

### **Sample of Study**

The study recruited 240 university students (123 male & 117 female) from Jordan. Data was gathered from the participants by administering online survey during 2021/2022 academic year. All the selected participants belong to different faculties, aged between (18 – 35) years, and represent different socioeconomic classes. The descriptive data gathered from the participants are summarised in Table (1) below.

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics of the participants

Variables	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	123	51.25%
	Female	117	48.75%

Academic level	First year	47	19.58%
	Second year	81	33.75%
	third year	73	30.41%
	Fourth year	39	16.25%
Academic specialization	Arts	53	22.08%
	Sciences	64	26.66%
	Medical science	39	16.25%
	Engineering	35	14.58%
	Commerce	49	20.41%

### Instruments of Study

For the sake of data collection, the study adopted the academic procrastination scale (Abu Ghazal, 2012) which measures procrastination in academic daily tasks through (21) items. To measure the participants' self-esteem, the study adopted self-esteem scale by (Aldrini, et al., 1983). It consists of (30) items that are divided into 10 items that tackle self-esteem on the part of friends, 10 items self-esteem on the part of family, and 10 items self-esteem on the part of university. The scales follow five-point Likert way in which each item has (5) options. Furthermore, the scales have been used sufficiently in examining similar domains of this study. The scales proved to be reliable and valid for measuring the constructs they are designed to measure. The scales were examined and reviewed by six professionals in psychology, and Psychometrics to check their validity. The professionals reported that the items are clear, well-written and suitable for this study. The reliability of the scales was investigated according to Alpha Cronbach's and Split-Half reliability as illustrated in Table (2) below.

Table 2  
The reliability scores of the scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half
academic procrastination	0.842	0.802
Self-esteem	0.871	0.829

### Results

#### **RQ1: Is there a correlation between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students?**

As presented in Table 3, Pearson correlation coefficient was run find out the correlation coefficient between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students. The results reported a low negative relationship between the levels of procrastination and self-esteem and its dimensions. The correlation coefficient of the participants' procrastination and self-esteem on part of friends (-0.17), the self-esteem on part of family (-0.21), and self-esteem on part of university (-0.19). Moreover, the total value of correlation coefficient of procrastination level in daily academic tasks and total self-esteem was (-0.28).

Table 3  
Pearson correlation coefficient results for procrastination and self-esteem

Dimensions	Self-esteem on part of friends	Self-esteem on part of family	Self-esteem on part of university	Total self-esteem
Procrastination	- 0.17*	- 0.21*	- 0.15*	-0.28
Total self-esteem	0.19*	0.24*	0.19*	1

\*Sig at ( $\alpha < 0.05$ )

**RQ2: What are the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students?**

One-sample t-test was calculated to examine the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students. As shown in Table 4 below, the results reported statistically significant moderate level of self-esteem and its dimensions among the university students. Moreover, the most influential dimension was self-esteem on part of family ( $mean = 3.55, sig = 0.00$ ), the second influential one was self-esteem on part of friends ( $mean = 3.48, sig = 0.03$ ). While self-esteem on part of university was the lowest influential dimension among students ( $mean = 2.96, sig = 0.03$ ). The level of procrastination was significant at a moderate level ( $mean = 3.61, sig = 0.00$ ), and slightly high than self-esteem level among the participants.

Table 4  
One-sample t-test results for procrastination and self-esteem

Variables	Dimensions	Mean	St. dev	t	Sig
Self-esteem	self-esteem on part of university	2.96	0.76	40.01	0.01*
	self-esteem on part of family	3.55	0.85	43.19	0.00*
	self-esteem on part of friends	3.48	0.45	77.49	0.03*
Procrastination		3.61	0.87	57.18	0.00*

\*Sig at ( $\alpha < 0.05$ )

**RQ3: What is the effect of gender, academic level, and academic specialization on levels of the procrastination and self-esteem among university students?**

Independent samples t-tests were run to explore whether the participants' gender had statistically significant effects on the level of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem. Furthermore, One-way analysis of variance was run to find out whether the participants' academic level and academic specialization had significant effects on level of the procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem as summarized in Tables (5, 6 & 7).

Table 5  
Results of t-test analysis based on the participants' gender

Variable	Category	N	Means	St.dev	F	Sig
Procrastination	Male	123	3.44	1.81	121.02	0.013*

	Female	117	3.26	1.90	98.83	
Self-esteem	Male	123	3.55	1.64	119.14	0.029*
	Female	117	3.51	1.69	113.75	

\*Sig at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

Table (5) showed that there was statistically significant effects for gender on the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students which was in favour of male students.

Table 6  
Results of One-way analysis according to the participants' academic level

Variable	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig
Procrastination	between group	2.39	3	0.10	0.71	0.41
	within group	140.10	236	0.13		
	Total	142.40	239			
Self-esteem	between group	2.28	3	0.74	1.51	0.19
	within group	98.37	236	0.46		
	Total	100.65	239			

The results as summarised in Table (6) did not reveal any statistically significant effects of the participants' academic level on the level of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students.

Table 7  
Results of One-way analysis based on participants academic specialization

Variable	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig
Procrastination	between group	1.27	3	0.26	0.92	0.21
	within group	139.41	236	0.18		
	Total	140.60	239			
Self-esteem	between group	1.69	3	0.63	0.97	0.13
	within group	97.29	236	0.33		
	Total	98.98	239			

\*Sig at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

The results as summarised in Table (7) failed to find any significant effects on levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among universities students according to their academic specialization.

## Discussion

Procrastination is believed to be harmful to humans' performance in several life tasks. Since university students are required to produce high quality academic work and projects, they tend to procrastinate more than any other groups. Procrastination comprises intentionally delay of an intended task of action, despite of an awareness of possible negative results. Previous studies on the phenomenon of procrastination have reported that it is more widespread among university students. The major objective of current study was to explore the

relationship between procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem of university students. A low negative relationship was found between the participants' procrastination in daily academic tasks and their self-esteem. That is when students' self-esteem decreases, procrastination in daily academic tasks increases. It can be explained that when university students have positive feelings about their overall self, it is less probably that they would delay the completion of any academic tasks.

Procrastination and self-esteem are cognitive-related constructs that are derived from ability to think in complex ways or in long-term ways. Therefore, it is about the individual ability and self-trusting to succeed in performing academic tasks. Possessing high self-esteem, students can be optimistic regarding tackling any academic task successfully. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem who lack self-confidence tend to escape from fronting the demands of academic tasks through procrastination. Those students become unmotivated to perform any tasks within their deadlines due to the lack of self-confidence. Consequently, the subconscious mind of procrastinating students will try to avoid any difficult tasks to protect their ego. In reality, it is self-regulate failure that makes individuals feel as if they are in self-control. The findings of our study were in harmony of the study of Babu, et al. (2019) which reported a statistically significant weak negative correlation between academic procrastination and self-esteem. Moreover, this finding supported the results obtained from Saleem and Rafique (2012) and Sawalha and Sawalha (2018).

In this current study, one of the objectives was to examine the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students. The results highlighted a moderate level of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem for the participants of this study. The study results provided that the level of the procrastination in daily academic tasks was slightly high than self-esteem level. One way to explain this result is that university students become more mature and experienced at both personal and academic level. They are able to overcome the negative consequences of their procrastination behavior, and thus handle challenges that rise from the high demands of academic tasks. These results were in agreement with the study of Ahmad (2021) who found out that the students' academic procrastination level was medium.

Moreover, the finding of current study showed that gender affected the levels of procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem in favor of male students. These results could be probably explained by the reality that female students show more organized and responsible attitude than male students. Similar findings were presented in a study conducted by Ahmad (2021); Babu, et al. (2019); and Khamis (2016) who reported statistically significant differences in level of academic procrastination based on gender variable. Finally, the current study did not spot any statistically significant differences on procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem according to academic level or academic specialization. The participants of the current study include only university students who share the same life conditions and patterns of education. This results resembled the findings obtained by Ahmad (2021), Sawalha and Sawalha

(2018) who found no significant differences in academic self-concept level according to students' academic achievement and specialization.

## Conclusion

Procrastination has been always showed to make an opposite influence on the academic performance of students and self-esteem. The findings of current study supported this viewpoint, as procrastination in daily academic tasks exhibited a negative relationship with self-esteem. The general idea is that behaviors of procrastination leave to university students little time to finish their academic tasks. Thus, resulting in low self-esteem, several studies have reported procrastination to be beneficial because procrastinators work under stress as they need to direct all their resources on one target with hope to achieve favorable findings. From this argue, there is a need to conduct more studies about academic procrastination. The self-reported scales consisting of items related the procrastination in daily academic tasks and self-esteem among university students could lead to biased results. This is why future research is encouraged to adopt interviews to gather qualitative data that look in-depth on this phenomenon. The use of a quantitative correlational approach did not permit for exploring the causal factors that initiate procrastination. Future studies are also invited to compare between academic procrastination among school students and university students. Finally, it is suggested that further research should aim at investigating the relationship between academic procrastination and other cultural and psychological variables (e.g., social class, ethnic background, self-efficacy, achievement motivations, depression, and anxiety).

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