

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHANGING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM ON STUDENT BEHAVIOUR. PROCRASTINATION: SYMPTOM OR...?

Ildikó TAKÁCS

Department of Ergonomics and Psychology
Budapest University of Technology and Economics
H-1521 Budapest, Hungary
Phone: (36-1) 463-4022, Fax: (36-1) 463- 2106
e-mail: takacsi@erg.bme.hu

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Abstract

In the current research we want to focus on appearing of the procrastinating behaviour in the academic environment. The procrastinating is the avoidance of doing a task which needs to be done – postponing until tomorrow what can be done today. Procrastination does not effect only the person's work but also commonly involves feeling such as guilt, inadequacy, self-disgust, stress and depression. Recently the phenomena have appeared in the Hungarian higher education postponing the studies. The examination took place at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. 55 students (38 males, 17 females) took part voluntarily in the procedure from several faculties. The personality was measured by Psychological Wellbeing and Personality Inventory (PWPI) and the procrastination behaviour by the Questionnaire of Procrastination Types. The results of the questionnaires were analyzed and compared the two main types: procrastinators and non-procrastinators.

Keywords: procrastinating, academic settings.

You have to write an article into a scientific journal about your research work. You know the deadline, you have enough data, you have read a lot about the subject, you know more and more about it day by day.

But you feel these data will not be enough, you need to read more articles on this field, you have to reanalyse the data, the relationships between the data and your ideas, hypotheses. You have already written some variants, some drafts. They are not good, not sufficient, not important....

Have you ever felt so, do you know these behaviours?

Are you a procrastinator?

There are people who do not finish their tasks by the deadline, who do not start or finish a task because they might not achieve very high standards, for whom only the perfect is good enough, who are afraid of failure because they are unable to keep their goals, or wait for a 'good time' to work, etc.

These features are examples of procrastinators' behavioural signs.

In the current research we want to focus on how procrastinating behaviour appears in the academic environment.

The new system of Hungarian higher education – the credit system – gives bigger freedom for students in organizing their studies.

The study schedule of the institutions has got less pressure or determined path prescribed till the end of the studies. Now there is less extrinsic motivation, simpler control of proficiency and changed penalty to persons who fall behind with their studies.

Recently, the phenomena of postponing studies have appeared in Hungarian higher education. The term of a university study by the curriculum is usually five years (ten semesters) but now there are a few students who study one or two years more.

When looking for the reason of this situation we found a phenomenon behind this behaviour: procrastination. Perhaps procrastination is not the only reason but if it is present, it will enhance this phenomenon.

Although with the new credit system students have to make decisions about

- their own path of the studies to their degrees,
- the order of subjects, practices and trainings,
- the length of the study period and time-table of their studies (TAKÁCS, [5]).

The outside environment which has not got any strict expectation gives possibility for certain people to procrastinate.

For the verification of the influence of the credit system data were collected from two faculties of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. 4.7 % of the students of one of these faculties (the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics) have overextended their studies (6th, 7th years), while 28.5% of the students of the other faculty (the Faculty of Architecture) have done so (GÁSPÁR, [3]).

We did not look for the reason of this extension, we just treated it as a symptom for the overextended studies.

1. What is Procrastination?

It is the avoidance of doing a task which needs to be done – postponing something until tomorrow that could be done today. Procrastination does not only affect the person's work but also commonly involves feelings such as guilt, inadequacy, self-disgust, stress and depression (DEQUINCEY, [1]).

Why do people procrastinate?

What are the main reasons for this behaviour?

- Lack of relevance
- Lack of interest
- Perfectionism: having extremely high standards which are almost unreachable
- Evaluation anxiety: concern over other's responses to your work
- Ambiguity: uncertainty of what is expected for the completion of the task
- Fear of failure and self-doubt

- Inability to handle the task: lack of training or skill necessary to complete the task
- Lack of information needed to complete the task
- Anxiety over expectations that others have of you (e.g., high pressure to succeed; expectations that you will fail)
- The task seems overwhelming or unmanageable
- You are actually overburdened, trying to manage too much.

Sometimes we do not feel these causes but feel we want to be perfect, or dream about reaching our goals, or worry about tasks or we want to do extra work. And at the end the work will not be fully completed.

Everybody has experienced these signs several times, everybody can keep postponing some tasks but not everybody is a chronic procrastinator. According to DRYDEN [2] some people are chronic specific procrastinators, what means that procrastination is characteristic of only some (and always the same) tasks or some areas of their lives. Chronic general procrastinators tend to procrastinate in a number of important areas of their lives.

2. Procedure

2.1. Sample

The examination took place at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. 55 students (38 males, 17 females) took part voluntarily in the procedure from several faculties.

2.2. The Methods

Personality was measured with the Psychological Wellbeing and Personality Inventory (PWPI) (JUHÁSZ–KUN, [4]) and procrastinating behaviour with the Questionnaire of Procrastination Types (43 students).

We made interviews with 12 students, who had overextended studies (6th, 7th year). In the structured interview the task was to characterize the procrastinating behaviour, and the students had to categorize themselves and others as belonging to one of the types.

The Psychological Wellbeing and Personality Inventory has 120 items and the following 15 scales:

1. Satisfaction with life
2. Burnout
3. Health awareness

Neuroticism

4. vulnerability
5. impulsivity
6. anger out
7. depression
8. anxiety
9. self assessment

Conscientiousness

10. self effectiveness
11. orderliness
12. dutifulness
13. self discipline
14. deliberation
15. striving for achievement

The other method was the Questionnaire of Procrastination Types. The question was:

Does it happen to you that you regularly postpone the realization of your tasks?

If the answer was yes, the next question was: *Do you fit one of these types?* The types were the following:

- A) Perfectionist
You are reluctant to start or finish a task because you might not achieve your unrealistically high standard.
- B) Dreamer
You have a tendency towards vagueness and lack of realism. You have great ideas but have difficulty transforming them into achievable goals.
- C) Worrier
You are afraid of things going wrong and of being overwhelmed by events. So you avoid risk or change and have little confidence in your ability to make decisions or tolerate discomfort.
- D) Crisis maker
You 'enjoy' declaring that you can't get motivated until the last moment, or that you do your best work then. You probably have a low threshold for boredom. Or perhaps you hope that your tasks will miraculously disappear or someone will come along and help you.
- E) Defier
Either you are aggressive and argumentative to others' suggestions or instructions because it implies that others are trying to tell you what to do or control you.
Or, you are passive-aggressive and tend to say 'Yes' when you mean 'No'. This can be a way of getting back at others if you are afraid to voice your true feelings.

F) Overdoer

You are always working at something and often making extra work for yourself but you don't focus on the important issues that need to be tackled. You have difficulty saying 'No'.

G) Relax procrastinator

You avoid the situation with stress and duty. You often postpone your tasks because you want to enjoy the entertainment or relax. You think several tasks can wait and momentary good things are more important.

(www.soas.ac.uk/studentfiles/procrastination.pdf)

2.3. Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this study were as follows:

The personality characteristics show the predisposition for procrastination.

1. The neuroticism scales show high rate and the conscientiousness scales are low or vice versa.
2. There exists a negative connection between the neuroticism scales and the scale of satisfaction with life and a positive relationship between the conscientiousness scales.
3. There exists a positive relationship between the conscientiousness scales and non-procrastinating behaviour.

2.4. Results and Discussion

We analysed the results of the questionnaires, and compared the two main types: procrastinators and non-procrastinators.

Correlations analyses were conducted between the main scales of the Psychological Wellbeing and Personality Inventory (PWPI).

The results show that the relationships between different scales are strong.

E. g. there is a strong relationship

between burnout and depression (0.713)
and anxiety (0.724)
and vulnerability (0.652).

There is a negative relationship

between burnout and life-satisfaction (-0.655)
and self-assessment (-0.537)
and self-effectiveness (-0.507).

Table 1. Mean of procrastinator and non procrastinator groups

Scales	procrastinating	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. satisfaction with life	procrastinator	26	64.93	11.83
	non-procrastinator	17	69.06	10.95
2. burnout	procrastinator	26	40.51	14.22
	non-procrastinator	17	33.59	10.82
3. health awareness	procrastinator	26	54.03	18.46
	non-procrastinator	17	64.76	14.95
4. vulnerability	procrastinator	26	44.10	15.69
	non-procrastinator	17	32.73	14.54
5. impulsivity	procrastinator	26	53.97	13.26
	non-procrastinator	17	47.78	14.14
6. anger out	procrastinator	26	44.35	20.86
	non-procrastinator	17	37.19	17.77
7. depression	procrastinator	26	44.35	19.18
	non-procrastinator	17	44.14	19.66
8. anxiety	procrastinator	26	51.92	20.97
	non-procrastinator	17	44.60	18.31
9. self assessment	procrastinator	26	56.53	16.20
	non-procrastinator	17	62.12	15.53
10. self effectiveness	procrastinator	26	63.67	10.78
	non-procrastinator	17	64.92	13.12
11. orderliness	procrastinator	26	63.71	16.36
	non-procrastinator	17	68.72	10.50
12. dutifulness	procrastinator	26	73.33	13.26
	non-procrastinator	17	72.64	18.68
13. self discipline	procrastinator	26	51.02	19.31
	non-procrastinator	17	67.16	10.02
14. deliberation	procrastinator	26	59.23	15.81
	non-procrastinator	17	62.76	16.97
15. striving for achievement	procrastinator	26	66.15	12.81
	non-procrastinator	17	70.53	14.57

One of the scales of neuroticism (vulnerability) has strong relations with the anger out scale (0.447), depression (0.512) anxiety (0.660) and negative relations with self-assessment (-0.670), self-effectiveness (-0.496), self-discipline (-0.575), and striving for achievement (-0.448).

The other scales from neuroticism (depression and anxiety) showed strong negative connections with satisfaction with life (-0.612 ; -0.498), self-assessment (-0.543 ; -0.707) and self-effectiveness (-0.412 ; -0.464), and anxiety had a connection with self-discipline (-0.542). The first hypothesis is mostly true.

The satisfaction with life scale has correlations with the conscientiousness scales: self-assessment (0.428), self-effectiveness (0.499) self-discipline (0.453) and striving for achievement (0.525). Some facts about the negative relationships between the neuroticism scales (see above) verify the second hypothesis.

Our third hypothesis was: those who scored high on the conscientiousness scales were non-procrastinators, what meant that there would have been significant differences on these scales between procrastinators and non procrastinators.

Therefore we analysed the differences between the procrastinator scales.

60.4% of the students characterized themselves as regular procrastinators.

We saw the results of these students and compared the results with those of non-procrastinators (with T-test)

We found significant differences between them only in the vulnerability ($p < 0.05$), health awareness ($p < 0.10$) and self-discipline ($p < 0.01$) scales. We saw only tendentious differences between the impulsivity, orderliness and self-assessment scales. This hypothesis is only partly true.

Our presumption about the characteristics of procrastinating personality – those who have low self-assessment, self-effectiveness, orderliness and deliberation, high anxiety, depression and burnout – were not verified in this population.

Perhaps there are other reasons behind this behaviour.

By the data of the Questionnaire of Procrastinator Types 26 students were procrastinators. They chose the fitting types from the list. (They could indicate more than one type.)

The chosen procrastinator types:

Relax procrastinator	16
Perfectionist	10
Overdoer	7
Worrier	7
Dreamer	6
Crisis maker	6

The most frequented pairs were: easy-going procrastinator with dreamer, perfectionist with overdoer and worrier.

The interviews with the students having had overextended studies had three steps. The first step was to realize procrastinating behaviour and to choose the fitting type for him/herself.

Second: categorizing other students to the types, and third: to decide the real types of students and the task was to compare their decisions. We had finished the interviews in one group to decide which person belongs to which type.

According to the interviews the students thought the real procrastinator is the easy-going procrastinator and the dreamer. The perfectionist and the worrier procrastinate the work.

Among 12 students there were three main types:

Easy-going procrastinator:	6
Perfectionist	4
Worrier	2

Table 2. Correlation between the scales of PWPI

Scales	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. satisfaction with life	1.000	-0.655	0.006	-0.554	-0.053	-0.231	-0.612	-0.498	0.428	0.499	0.074	0.280	0.453	0.119	0.525
2. burnout	0.000	1.000	0.967	0.000	0.735	0.135	0.000	0.001	0.004	0.001	0.638	0.859	0.002	0.448	0.000
3. health awareness	0.655	1.000	-0.189	0.652	0.088	0.462	0.713	0.724	0.537	-0.507	0.116	0.096	-0.460	-0.021	-0.550
4. vulnerability	0.000	0.000	0.224	0.000	0.573	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.461	0.541	0.002	0.896	0.000
5. impulsivity	0.006	-0.189	1.000	-0.010	-0.134	-0.085	0.147	-0.116	0.006	0.127	0.141	0.099	0.305	0.131	0.110
6. anger out	0.967	0.224	0.000	0.949	0.390	0.587	0.346	0.460	0.970	0.415	0.367	0.528	0.047	0.401	0.482
7. depression	-0.554	0.652	-0.010	1.000	0.168	0.447	0.512	0.660	0.670	0.496	0.047	0.225	-0.575	0.038	-0.448
8. anxiety	0.000	0.000	0.949	0.000	0.282	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.766	0.147	0.000	0.811	0.003
9. self assessment	-0.053	0.088	-0.134	0.168	1.000	0.291	-0.026	-0.008	-0.156	-0.349	-0.179	-0.176	-0.033	-0.587	-0.305
10. self effectiveness	0.735	0.573	0.390	0.282	0.000	0.058	0.867	0.961	0.318	0.022	0.250	0.260	0.835	0.000	0.047
11. order	-0.231	0.462	-0.085	0.447	0.291	1.000	0.323	0.449	-0.202	-0.326	-0.086	-0.030	-0.208	-0.312	-0.406
12. dutifulness	0.135	0.002	0.587	0.003	0.058	0.000	0.035	0.003	0.195	0.033	0.584	0.850	0.181	0.042	0.007
13. self discipline	-0.612	0.713	0.147	0.512	-0.026	0.323	1.000	0.661	-0.543	-0.421	0.098	0.144	-0.230	0.113	-0.387
14. deliberation	0.000	0.000	0.346	0.000	0.867	0.035	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005	0.531	0.359	0.135	0.471	0.010
15. striving for achievement	0.001	0.000	0.460	0.000	0.961	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.720	0.136	0.000	0.329	0.015
	0.428	-0.537	0.006	-0.670	-0.156	-0.202	-0.543	-0.707	1.000	0.566	0.028	-0.189	0.463	0.040	0.337
	0.499	-0.507	0.127	-0.496	-0.349	-0.326	-0.421	-0.464	1.000	0.000	0.859	0.224	0.002	0.799	0.027
	0.001	0.001	0.415	0.001	0.022	0.033	0.005	0.002	1.000	0.000	0.139	0.017	0.415	0.185	0.530
	0.074	0.116	0.141	-0.047	-0.179	-0.086	0.098	-0.056	0.028	0.139	1.000	0.015	0.006	0.235	0.000
	0.638	0.461	0.367	0.766	0.250	0.584	0.531	0.720	0.859	0.373	0.000	0.926	0.295	0.141	0.899
	0.028	0.096	-0.099	0.225	-0.176	-0.030	0.144	0.231	-0.189	0.017	0.015	1.000	-0.205	0.002	-0.052
	0.859	0.541	0.528	0.147	0.260	0.850	0.359	0.136	0.224	0.916	0.926	0.000	0.187	0.991	0.743
	0.453	-0.460	0.305	-0.575	-0.033	-0.208	-0.231	-0.542	0.463	0.415	0.164	-0.205	1.000	-0.193	0.356
	0.002	0.002	0.047	0.000	0.835	0.181	0.135	0.000	0.002	0.006	0.294	0.187	0.000	0.215	0.019
	0.119	-0.021	0.131	0.038	-0.587	-0.372	0.113	0.153	0.040	0.185	0.228	0.002	-0.193	1.000	0.138
	0.448	0.896	0.401	0.811	0.000	0.042	0.471	0.329	0.799	0.235	0.141	0.991	0.215	0.000	0.379
	0.525	-0.550	0.110	-0.448	-0.305	-0.406	-0.387	-0.369	0.337	0.530	-0.020	-0.052	0.356	0.138	1.000
	0.000	0.000	0.482	0.003	0.047	0.007	0.010	0.015	0.027	0.000	0.899	0.743	0.019	0.379	0.000
	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3. Summary

The procrastinating behaviour ruins productivity, the person's relationships, the ability and possibility of work.

How can we overcome procrastinating in an academic environment?

What are the tasks of the student counsellor?

1. to recognize the influence of the credit system on the students' tasks and time management
2. to recognize the signs and the causes of the procrastinating behaviour.

The student counsellor has to suggest the strategy for overcoming procrastination:

- awareness – that the student is a real procrastinator,
- goal-directedness – to identify goals and to make realistic decisions about how to do the tasks and to prioritize,
- commitment – to put up with short term pains for longer-term gains,
- persistence – willingness to repeat the procedures. (DRYDEN, [2])

The counsellor can give help to the students to develop and to practice behavioural and cognitive strategies.

For these aims we have to make new researches to know the causes of procrastinating behaviour in the academic setting.

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