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Striving for Perfect Grades, Delaying Delivery: Exploring Multidimensional Perfectionism and Academic Procrastination

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ABSTRACT

The current research aimed to investigate the association between multidimensional perfectionism and academic procrastination among college and university students, while also exploring the influence of selected demographic variables, including birth order, educational level (college vs. university), and Grade Point Average (GPA). The sample consisted of 300 students, equally divided between college (n = 150) and university (n = 150) institutions. Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) and the Tuckman Procrastination Scale (Tuckman, 1991). Correlational analyses demonstrated a substantial association between academic procrastination and various dimensions of perfectionism. Independent samples t-tests indicated that university students were more highly procrastinators than college students. Last-born students exhibited higher levels of procrastination students compared to other birth orders, while first-born students reported higher levels of perfectionism. Students with lower GPAs tended to procrastinate more than average competent and high GPAs students. These results illustrate the intricate relationship among perfectionism, procrastination, and demographics in the academic setting.

Keywords: *Academic procrastination, Birth order, GPA, Perfectionism*

INTRODUCTION

Many students frequently procrastinate when completing their work despite knowing their deadlines in advance. Procrastination may be a common occurrence for students, but this association can interfere with students' academic performance and mental health. Perfectionism, or striving for perfection, is another common issue for students. Perfectionism can be motivating when it stems from within; however, when perfectionism is a result of external pressure, procrastination and problems (like low grades and stress) arise. Academic procrastination and perfectionism are often linked, which hinders students' success in post-secondary.

Procrastination

Procrastination is a common habit that involves putting off tasks until the last minute, despite having enough time to complete them. It is a self-regulation style that affects not only our behaviour but also our

thoughts and feelings. According to Lay (1986), procrastination is the illogical tendency to put off tasks that we know we should complete. It is like hitting the snooze button on our responsibilities, even when we know we should be tackling them head-on. Research suggests that procrastination is not just about delaying tasks, but also involves emotional and mental struggles (Ferrari & Tice, 2000).Procrastination is a pervasive issue that affects many aspects of our behaviour, but it's especially prevalent in academic settings. Academic procrastination refers to the habit of delaying academic responsibilities, such as studying for exams or finishing projects, despite knowing they need to be done. It's a motivation killer that can lead to missed deadlines, lost opportunities, and unnecessary stress (Ackerman & Gross, 2005).

Procrastination is an ambiguous action which despite its deleteriousness of behaviour, we are still looking for a more complete understanding of its conjunction of reasons and motivations. It can be examined as behavioural, cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and psychoanalytic. Some view procrastination as a rebellion against parents expectations (Haycock et al., 1998), while others see it as having learned behaviours, while still some take the view that procrastination is caused by preferred over learned or participating activities (MacCown, 1986). Cognitive theorists have offered a range of reasons, including irrational beliefs, self-doubt, fear of failure, wish for more time, and time management as potential reasons for procrastination (Rothblum, 1990). Procrastination on one hand may appear inconsequential to some behaviour; however, procrastination may lead to behaviours that are problematic, retaining a recognizable social and emotional consequences as shown in the study of Kiamarsi (2010). On its own, procrastination determines the act of choice for the individual. Procrastination, has made some individuals perform poorly in tasks relative to performance competition; consequentially, procrastination is harmful to some, and can affect character, academics, and psychological well-being (Gosh & Roy, 2017).

Surprisingly, some researchers have determined procrastination does not have a clear relationship with achieving academic success. For example, Prohaska et al., (2000), noted there was not a relationship between procrastination and academic success. However, other studies tell a different story. For instance, Semb et al., (1979) reported that procrastination was itself related to poor academic performance, indicating that procrastination itself can ultimately impact our grades or academic progression.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a complex personality characteristic that motivates people to demand unrealistically high expectations and standards for themselves and for others. It is marked by self-criticism and a commitment to perfectionism(Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Perfectionists often set unrealistically high goals and judge themselves harshly when they fail to meet them. Research has shown that perfectionism is a multifaceted trait with various facets, including self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism (Stoeber & Childs, 2010).

Self-oriented perfectionism refers to setting strict standards for oneself and strictly evaluating and condemning one's own behavior (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially prescribed perfectionism occurs when people believe or consider important others to have unrealistic standards for them and critically evaluate those standards and put pressure on them to achieve perfection" (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Other-Oriented Perfectionism refers to having unrealistic standards for significant others, valuing the perfection of others, and critically evaluating the performance of others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). To measure these three domains of perfectionism, researchers used the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. Tools such as the MPS scale assess self-directed, other-directed, and socially prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Perfectionism and procrastination may seem like vastly different traits, but they share some common ground. Both involve unrealistic expectations and negative consequences. Research suggests that perfectionism and procrastination are closely linked (Çapan, 2010). Ferrari (1992) conducted a study to explore the association between procrastination and perfectionism among college students. The researcher surveyed 307 students, assessing their tendencies towards procrastination and perfectionism, as well as their self-perception, self-awareness, and self-handicapping behaviors. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = .34$, $P < .001$) between perfectionism and procrastination, suggesting that students who struggle with procrastination often also struggle with high standards and self-criticism.

In 2006, Nounopoulos et.al surveyed 166 young people and discovered that having high standards was linked to effective coping strategies. Moreover, the researchers found that academic confidence played a crucial role in the association between perfectionistic tendencies and educational attainment, as measured by grade point average (GPA). Another study by (Chang, 2006) found that, students who exhibited adaptive perfectionism tendencies tended to excel academically, achieving higher grades in exams, courses, and overall cumulative GPA. On the other hand, maladaptive perfectionism did not consistently predict academic success, suggesting that the type of perfectionism matters in determining academic outcomes.

Rationale of Study

Academic success is often hindered by two major obstacles: perfectionism and procrastination. These traits can cause significant stress and anxiety among students, making it essential to understand their relationship and impact. This study aims to explore the association between different dimensions of perfectionism and academic procrastination among college and university students, taking into account variables such as birth order, type of educational institution, and GPA. Although prior research has examined the separate influences of perfectionism and procrastination on academic performance, there remains limited understanding of how these factors interact across varied demographic backgrounds. The current research seeks to address this gap by analyzing the intricate relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and academic procrastination within a diverse student population.

METHOD

Objectives

Objectives of the present research are:

1. To investigate the relationship between dimensions of perfectionism and academic procrastination.
2. To determine the prevalence of academic procrastination and perfectionism across birth order.
3. To explore the prevalence of academic procrastination among university and college students.
4. To measure the extent of academic procrastination across different GPA levels.

Hypotheses

H1: Academic procrastination will be significantly correlated with self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism.

H2: There will be a substantial difference in prevalence of academic procrastination and perfectionism birth order wise.

H3: There will be a substantial difference in prevalence of academic procrastination among university and college students.

H4: Academic procrastination will vary significantly according to GPA levels.

Instruments

In this study in order to measure the variables two reliable questionnaires were used namely Tuckman Procrastination Scale and Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. A demographic sheet was also used along with these scales.

Demographic Sheet

Demographic sheet was used for information about birth order, GPA and institution level.

Tuckman Procrastination Scale (TPS)

Tuckman (1991) created a scale to assess procrastination tendencies, but the questions on the scale are largely tailored to academic settings and have been extensively utilized to measure procrastination among students (Klassen & Kuzucu, 2009).The Cronbach's alpha value for TPS has been reported to be 0.86 (Tuckman, 1991).The scale comprises of 16 items rated on a four-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = this is definitely me, 2 = that is my tendency, 3 = that is not my tendency, 4 = this is definitely not me). Some items (6, 12, 14, and 16) are reverse-coded.

MultidimensionalPerfectionism Scale (MPS)

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale was developed by Hewitt and Flett in 1991 is a widely used tool to assess perfectionism traits among students (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). This 45-item instrument evaluates perfectionism across three distinct subscales: Self-Oriented, Other-Oriented, and Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism. Each subscale consists of 15 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The MPS provides a comprehensive understanding of perfectionism, with high reliability scores: .90 for self-oriented perfectionism, .53 for other-oriented perfectionism, and .80 for socially prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Some items were reverse coded to ensure accurate scoring. Higher scores indicate greater perfectionism on each subscale.

Sample

The study sample consist of N=300 students (150 university students, 150 college students=150) purposively drawn from different colleges (Government Postgraduate College for Women Haripur, Government Degree College for Women, Haripur) and University of Haripur. Students are between 19 and 25 years old.

Procedure

Informed consent was provided before administering questionnaire and participants were told about objectives of research. Then questionnaires were administered related to the perfectionism and academic procrastination. After data collection, SPSS version 20 was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Table 1

Psychometric Properties of Demographic Variables

Variables	n	%
Birth Order		
1. First Born	95	31.7
2. Middle Born	130	43.3
3. Last Born	75	25.0
Institution		
1. University	150	50.0
2. College	150	50.0
GPA		
1. Low	54	18.0
2. Average	156	52.0
3. High	90	30.0

Note. n=no of sample, GPA=Grade Point Average & %= Percentage

Table 1 is showing the psychometric properties of the demographic variables. For first birth born, middle born and last born participants, numerical values are (n=95, 31.7%; n=130, 43.3% & n=75, 25%) respectively. There is an even split between participants attending university (n=150, 50%) and college (n=150, 50%). Meanwhile 18.0%, 52.0% and 30.0% of students had low, average and high GPA respectively.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation for Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.Academic procrastination	-			
2.Self-oriented perfectionism	.21**	-		
3.Other-oriented perfectionism	.27**	.66**	-	
4.Socially prescribed perfectionism	.23**	.72**	.71**	-

Note. **ρ<.01

Table 2 is depicting the Pearson correlation among study variables. The findings indicate that academic procrastination is significantly and positively correlated with dimensions of perfectionism.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation and One-way Analysis of Variance of Procrastination and Perfectionism across Birth Order (N=300)

	first born	n=95	middle born	n=130	last born	n=75		
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F(2,297)	η^2
Procrastination	37.6	8.02	34.25	11.9	38.77	8.06	5.8**	0.19
Perfectionism	188.4	63.52	162.3	79.4	187.92	53.6	5.2**	0.18

Note. n=No of Cases, M= Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, **ρ<.01&η^2=Partial Eta Square

Table 3 is illustrating the mean, standard deviation and *F*-values for procrastination and perfectionism across birth order. Findings indicated significant mean differences across birth order on procrastination with F (2,297) =5.8, ρ <.01. Results showed that last born students exhibited higher level of procrastination as compared to first and middle born. Findings also revealed significant mean differences across birth order on perfectionism with F (2,297) =5.2, ρ<.01. Results showed that first-born students showed higher levels of perfectionism than last-born students and middle-born students.

Table 4

Mean Standard Deviation and t-values of university and college students on Tuckman Procrastination Scale

	university students n=150		college students n=150				
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t(298)	ρ	Cohen's *d*
TPS	35.51	11.61	30.12	13.18	3.7	.000	0.43

Note.n=No of cases,M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, ρ =Significance Level& TPS=Tuckman Procrastination Scale

Table 4revealed significant mean differences on Tuckman Procrastination Scale with t (298) =3.7, ρ<.001. The findings showed that university students exhibited higher score on academic procrastination (M=35.51, SD=11.61) compared to the college students (M=30.12, SD=13.18).

Table 5

Mean Standard deviation and One-way analysis of variance of Academic Procrastination across GPA

	Low GPA n=54		Average GPA n=156		High GPA n=90			
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F(2,297)	η^2
Procrastination	36.96	11.22	32.10	12.85	31.57	12.86	3.63*	0.04

Note. GPA=Grade Point Average,n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, *ρ<.05&η^2=Partial Eta Square

Table 5 is illustrating the means, standard deviations, and F values for academic procrastination in GPA. Findings indicate that the mean difference in GPA for academic procrastination is significant, F (2,297) =3.63, ρ<.05. Results showed that students with low level of GPA exhibited higher level of academic procrastination as compared to students with average and high GPA.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to evaluate a quantitative survey on "Striving for Perfect Grades, Delaying Delivery: Exploring Multidimensional Perfectionism and Academic Procrastination" in university and college students. Sample consists of 300 universities and college students. TPS was used to measure academic procrastination and MPSwas used to measure perfectionism. This correlational study aimed to understand multidimensional perfectionism and academic procrastination among college and university students and explore the role of demographic variables such as birth order, institutional level, and GPA.

The first hypothesis suggested that academic procrastination would be significantly associated with self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. As presented in Table 2, the findings indicate that academic procrastination is indeed significantly related to all three

forms of perfectionism. The direction of these results aligns with existing literature. For instance, a study by Ghosh and Roy (2017), involving a sample of 150 students—90 females and 60 males—found a significant positive relationship between academic procrastination and the three dimensions of perfectionism: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed. These findings imply that students who frequently delay academic tasks are more likely to display perfectionistic traits across these specific domains.

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in the prevalence of academic procrastination and perfectionism in birth order.The results presented in table 3showed that last born students exhibit high level of procrastination while first born students were more perfectionists. These findings align with the existing research. Gabriel conducted study in 2015 and found that most last-born children and some middle children procrastinated academically, while only a minority of first-born children procrastinated (Gabriel, 2015).In 2016, Louis and Kumar conducted a study to explore how birth order and academic ability impact the tendency to present oneself as a perfectionist among undergraduate engineering students. Their research revealed firstborn children were more likely to exhibit perfectionistic behaviors, suggesting that birth order may play a role in shaping perfectionistic tendencies. The study also finds that paternal influences play a significant role in shaping perfectionism.

The third hypothesis stated that levels of academic procrastination would significantly differ between college and university students. As shown in Table 4, the results revealed that university students exhibited significantly higher levels of procrastination compared to their college counterparts. The data is not consistent with established research findings. Khan et al. (2014) explored “Academic procrastination among male and female college and university students.” Data analysis revealed significant differences between the two groups, further indicating that college students are more likely to procrastinate than college students. Contrary to previous studies by Khan et al. (2014), our findings show that university students are more likely to procrastinate than college students may be attributed to the unique environmental dynamics of co-education in universities which is not present in colleges and is a crucial factor contributing to the higher prevalence of academic procrastination among university students. In contrast, colleges without co-education may have a more focused academic environment, reducing the likelihood of distractions and subsequent procrastination. This factor may explain why university students in our study procrastinated more than college students.

Fourth hypothesis posits that academic procrastination will vary significantly according to GPA levels. According to table 5, the results demonstrated significant mean differences across GPA on academic procrastination. Students with low level of GPA exhibited higher level of academic procrastination as compared to students with average and high GPA. This finding aligns with existing research. A study was undertaken by Hen and Goroshit (2014) to explore “Academic procrastination, emotional intelligence, academic self-efficacy, and GPA: A comparison between students with and without learning disabilities.” The study’s results showed that academic procrastination have a negative impact on academic performance with students who procrastinate more likely to have lower GPAs. Furthermore research has shown that students with lower GPAs tend to procrastinate more than students with higher GPAs, indicating that academic procrastination is a contributing factor to poor academic performance.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Following are the shortcomings and suggestions of research;

1. Sample size (N=300) was not standard sample size and findings of the study are limited to the university and college population in Haripur city, which restricts their applicability to other

educational institutions across the country. To improve the generalizability of findings, future studies are encouraged to use random sampling methods and include a larger, more diverse participant pool.

2. Future investigations should explore additional factors that may influence the connection between perfectionism and academic procrastination, such as socioeconomic background, parental education levels, and family environment.

IMPLICATION

The findings of this study can help identify why students experience academic procrastination, including aspects of multidimensional perfectionism that may inform the development of university services. This information can help universities learn about their students' particular difficulties and devise specific policies or strategies to reduce those risks. The study findings should be useful in developing intervention strategies and establishing university policies to prevent procrastination and ultimately develop healthy habits surrounding academic expectations. That could take the form of time management workshops, academic supports and counselling to focus specifically on procrastination and perfectionism risks.

CONCLUSION

The issue of procrastination is still present in academic contexts, and it is impacting students' success. The findings of this study displayed that multidimensional perfectionism-related sub-types produced unique relationships with academic procrastination in our sample of post-secondary students. With students becoming transitionally prepared for their future professions, further entrenching our understanding of the higher-education context contributory variables that foster procrastination is critical. While there has been movement on the topic, it likely appears there is still inefficient exploration on the elements specific to procrastination regarding its intrinsic and separate aspects in an academic context. Future investigations into procrastination should expand their ranges of potential reasons why students procrastinate, including the desire not to fail and an imbalance between two task value components, to develop evidence-based effective combating for such a persistent vice. If educational professionals theorize the unclear association between perfectionism and procrastination, using that knowledge will inform their students to work towards achieving perfect grades without making a habit of procrastinating in submitting their academic work, and ultimately support student well-being, and success.

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