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Investigation into the academic procrastination of teacher candidates’ social studies with regard to their personality traits

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the academic procrastination of the prospective teachers of Social Studies and the multidimensional perfectionist personality traits. The study group of this research is comprised of 571 prospective teachers who are undergraduate students at the Department of Social Sciences Teaching of Afyon Kocatepe University and Çukurova University in the fall semester of 2013-2014 academic year. “Academic Procrastination Scale” and “Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” have been used as instruments for data collection. The analyses conducted have revealed that there are significant relationships between academic procrastination of the teacher candidates and perfectionist personality traits. Findings have been discussed in the light of the relevant body of literature.

Keywords: Procrastination, Academic Procrastination, Multidimensional Perfectionism

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1. Introduction

With an origin which is nearly as old as the humankind itself, procrastination behavior continues to exist today on a widespread scale. Knaus (2000) argues that procrastination behavior might have emerged when people that lived in clans 2.5 million years ago did not carry out the works to be done on time and delayed them instead. Although procrastination behavior dates from such an early time, it has only been intensively studied over the last 30 to 35 years (Milgram, Mey-Tal & Levison, 1998).

Procrastination is defined as “postponement of tasks and adjourning” (Stevenson, 2013). However, the concept of procrastination is treated differently in scientific studies in a more comprehensive way than its definition in dictionaries. Procrastination behavior can be defined as delaying the tasks to be done to a later time due to various reasons. Solomon & Rothblum (1984: 503) highlight the affective aspect of the procrastination behavior, defining it as “the circumstances in which one delays carrying out the tasks that need to be done unnecessarily until a point where they disturb him/her”. Senecal, Koestner & Vallerand (1995) address the relationship between procrastination and motivation by defining procrastination as the inability of people to carry out given tasks on time due to poor motivation as well as poor time management and idleness.

When we consider the studies conducted on procrastination, it is recognized that procrastination is classified in various ways. One of such classifications is “chronic (as a personality trait) and situational procrastination”. While chronic procrastination is defined as the tendency of an individual towards constant postponement in a large number of aspects of their lives, situational procrastination is defined as the tendency of an individual towards constant postponement in a specific aspect of life (Vestervelt, 2000). In this study, “academic procrastination” as a subtype of situational procrastination (Ferrari & Pychyl, 2000; Vestervelt, 2000) is examined as it adversely affects the academic success of students (Eerde, 2003; Hannok, 2011; Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami 1986; Steel, Brothen & Wambach, 2001), prevents them from pursuing an academic career and it is observed commonly among students.

Academic procrastination behavior is defined as “delaying the initiation or completion of academic tasks on non-rational grounds” (Senecal, Julien & Guay, 2003;135). In the studies conducted so far, it has been found out that academic procrastination behavior is prevalent among students. For instance Ellis & Kanus (1977) state that procrastination behavior is seen among students with a percentage of 70% to 95% (Quotation: Klassen, Krawchuk & Rajani, 2008:916). In another study, it has been discovered that 77,4% of students are procrastinators and nearly half of students often or always postpone their academic duties (Sokolowska, 2009).

According to the studies conducted, the frequency of procrastination varies in relation to the type of the academic duty. For example, Beswick, Rothblum & Mann (1988) identified that 46% of the students exhibit procrastination behavior while they are preparing their term papers, 31% of them do so while preparing for the exams and 47% of them delay their tasks while they are doing their weekly reading assignments. Solomon & Rothblum (1984) asserted that 46% of the students manifest procrastination behavior while they are writing their term papers, approximately 27% of them display procrastination behavior while preparing for the exams and 30,1% of them exhibit such behavior while doing their weekly assignments. In a similar study, it has been found out that nearly 42% of college students delay writing term papers, 39,3% of them delay preparing for the exams and 60% of them delay doing their weekly reading assignments (Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

It is known that there is a relationship between academic procrastination behavior which is common among students and certain factors. Studies carried out have demonstrated that there is positive correlation between poor time management and academic procrastination (Balkıs, E. Duru, Buluş & S. Duru, 2006). Another factor that has a correlation with academic procrastination is motivation. Bronlow & Reasinger (2000) have demonstrated with their studies that students with a higher level of inner drive is less likely to exhibit academic procrastination behavior than those with a lower level of inner drive. As well as ability to manage time effectively and motivation, procrastination behavior is in relation with such factors as responsibility (Lee, Kelly & Edwards, 2006; Lay, Kovacs & Danto, 1998; Johnson & Bloom, 1995), avoidance coping (Bridges & Roig, 1997) and fear of failure (Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami, 1986; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Özer & Altn, 2011).
Apart from the abovementioned studies, it is now known that academic procrastination behavior is linked with perfectionist personality traits (Çakıcı, 2003; Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990; Kandemir, 2010). Perfectionism is the desire to attain high standards and the inclination to find oneself unsatisfactory and criticize oneself after assessment with respect to such standards (Frost et al., 1990). Perfectionism is an energy source that can be utilized in a positive or negative manner and it improves an individual’s personal, professional and academic success (Roedell, 1984; quotation: Kırdoğ, 2004).

Hewitt and Flett (1991a) classify perfectionism into three dimensions, which are self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. While self-oriented perfectionism involves the high standards that the individual sets for himself and the strict assessment of oneself against these standards, in other-oriented perfectionism the expectation of perfectionism is oriented to others. In other words, this dimension involves an individual’s setting unrealistic standards for others and the strict assessment of their performances against these standards. Finally, socially prescribed perfectionism involves believing that others have high expectations that the individual will attain unrealistically high standards (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). As opposed to Hewitt & Flett (1991a), Frost et al. (1990) classified perfectionism in six different sub-dimensions:

1) Concern Over Mistakes: This dimension involves overreacting to even trivial mistakes and regarding them equal to complete failure. Individuals with such a trait are oversensitive to mistakes.
2) Personal Standards: This dimension involves individuals’ setting high standards for themselves.
3) Parental Expectations: In this dimension, an individual believes that his/her parents have set high standards for him/her.
4) Doubts about Action: Individuals within this dimension are in doubt whether they will accomplish what they do or not.
5) Parental Criticism: These are the criticisms by parents directed at the performance of the individual.
6) Organization: This dimension indicates how much importance the individual attaches to organization, planning and cleanliness (Frost et al., 1990).

Studies which are concerned with the relationship between procrastination and perfectionist personality traits have been carried out, taking the classification for perfectionism made by Hewitt & Flett (1991a) into account (Kandemir, 2010). However, in this study, we aim to examine academic procrastination behavior with regard to the six dimensional structures which Frost et al. (1990) identified pertaining to the structure of perfectionism.

1.1. Problem

The problem sentence of this study has been determined as “Is there a significant relationship between the academic procrastination of prospective teachers of Social Sciences and their perfectionist personality traits?” Sub-problems have been examined so that we can find solutions to the main problem.

1.2. Sub-problems

Is there a significant relationship between the academic procrastination of the prospective teachers of Social Sciences and the

- Organization,
- Concern over mistakes,
- Doubts about action,
- Parental expectations,
- Perception of parental criticism,
- High personal standards dimensions of perfectionism?

1.3. Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the academic procrastination of
prospective teachers of Social Sciences and the multidimensional perfectionist personality traits.

2. Method

2.1. Study model

Relational screening model has been used in this study, which aims to investigate the relationship between the academic procrastination of the teacher candidates’ Social Studies and perfectionist personality traits. Relational screening model is a study model that seeks to identify “the existence and/or the degree of covariance of two or more variables” (Karasar, 2013:81).

2.2. Study Group

The study group of this study is comprised of prospective teachers who are undergraduate students at the Department of Social Sciences Teaching of Afyon Kocatepe University and Çukurova University in the fall semester of 2013-2014 academic year. In total there are 517 prospective teachers in this study, 236 (45.6) of whom are female and 281 (%54.4) of whom are male students.

2.3. Instruments for Data Collection

In this study, an “Academic Procrastination Tendency” scale to identify their academic procrastination behavior and a “Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” to identify the students’ perfectionist personality traits has been used.

2.3.1. Academic Procrastination Scale (APS)

Academic procrastination scale was developed by Çakıcı (2003) with the aim of identifying the study habits of students. The scale is comprised of items that aim to measure students’ attitude towards academic tasks such as doing assignments and preparing for exams which they are responsible for in their academic pursuits. The scale is a five point likert scale in which the responses of students varies from “This is absolutely true for me” and “This is definitely not the case for me”. There are 19 items in the measuring instrument, 7 of which are positive and 12 of which are negative. Ascending scores on the scale indicate that the tendency to procrastinate is higher (Çakıcı, 2003).

2.3.2. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)

“Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” developed by Frost et al. (1990) with the aim of measuring the perfectionist personality traits in individuals has been adapted to Turkish by Özbay & Mısırlı-Taşdemir (2003). The Turkish version is comprised of six factors as is the original analysis of the scale. The scale which is a five point likert type scale has 35 items. There aren’t any items that are graded reversely in the scale. The responses given to the questions vary from “I definitely agree” to “I definitely disagree”. The lowest score one can get on the scale is 35 and the highest score is 175. Ascending scores indicate that the trait of perfectionism gets more intense (Özbay & Mısırlı-Taşdemir, 2003).

3. Finding

Correlation is used to determine to answer the question: “Is there a significant relationship between the academic procrastination of prospective teachers of Social Studies and their perfectionist personality traits?”. Table 1 shows the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis results of the relationship between the academic procrastination
of the prospective teachers and the trait of perfectionism.

Table 1. The relationship between Academic Procrastination (AP) and Perfectionism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP Organization</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>-0.299**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Doubts about actions</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>0.154**</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Concerns over mistakes</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Parental expectation</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Parental criticism</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0.223**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Personal standards</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>-0.156**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.01

According to the results of the correlation analysis on the sub-dimensions of perfectionism and academic procrastination in Table 1, there is a significant negative correlation between academic procrastination and organization (r= -0.299, p<0.01) and personal standards (r= -0.156, p<0.01). There is a significant positive correlation between academic procrastination and doubts about actions (r= 0.154, p<0.01) and perception of parental criticism (r= 0.223, p<0.01). According to the same table, there isn’t any significant correlation between academic procrastination behavior and concern over mistakes and parental expectations.

4. Discussion

In this study, academic procrastination of prospective teachers of Social Studies has been examined with regard to their perfectionist personality traits. In this section, we have discussed the hypotheses tested during this study in the light of scientific literature.

According to the correlation analysis carried out on the academic procrastination of the prospective teachers of Social Studies and the organization sub-dimension of perfectionism, as perfectionist organization increases, the frequency of academic procrastination decreases. These findings are also supported by other studies (Frost et al., 1990; Kağan, Çakır, İlhan & Kandemir, 2010; Kandemir, 2010; Saroğlu, 2011). Judging by the results of the studies conducted so far, students who tend to live in a more orderly, clean and planned manner and endeavor to apply these standards to their daily lives can be said to exhibit behavior of academic procrastination less frequently.

It has been discovered that there is a significant positive correlation between sub-dimension of doubts over actions as one of the perfectionist behavior patterns and behavior of academic procrastination. In accordance with such findings, academic procrastination behavior increases in frequency in parallel with an increase in the tendency towards doubt over actions on the part of the student (Frost et al., 1990; Saroğlu, 2011). An individual desires to attain perfect results, fulfilling a task with as few mistakes as possible in the dimension of doubt over actions. Due to the desire to attain perfect results, the individual has extreme doubt over the accuracy of his/her work and as to whether his/her performance attains standards or not. This doubt impels the individual to check what s/he has done over and over. Wasting a great deal of time due to the need for frequent checking, the individual has difficulty in time management and this, in turn, leads to the individual’s displaying academic procrastination behavior. When relevant body of literature is examined, one can see that poor time management triggers academic procrastination.
behavior (Balkis et al., 2006; Kağan, 2009, 2010; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984).

There is an insignificant and weak correlation between academic procrastination behavior of students and the sub-dimension of concern over mistakes as one of the perfectionist behavior patterns. There aren’t any conclusions supporting such a correlation in the relevant literature. As opposed to this, studies conducted by Frost et al. (1990) and Sarıoğlu (2011) revealed a significant positive correlation between concern over mistakes dimension of perfectionism and academic procrastination behavior. Individuals that have extreme concern over mistakes have zero tolerance towards mistakes and such individuals may consider making mistakes equal to complete failure as they attach too much importance to avoiding mistakes. According to Hamachek (1978), ordinary perfectionists readily accept trivial mistakes and they might still find their overall performances successful despite some negligible mistakes. However, neurotically perfectionist individuals overstate their mistakes and believe that their performance cannot attain the desirable level of success due to the few negligible mistakes they have made (quotation: Özbay & Mısır-Taşdemir, 2003). The fact that there has emerged a weak and insignificant correlation between the dimension of concern over mistakes and academic procrastination behavior can be explained by the lack of perfectionism on a neurotic level in the students that have taken part in this study when they showed concern over mistakes.

It has been found out that there is a weak insignificant correlation between the students’ academic procrastination and parental expectations sub-dimension of perfectionism. Similar results have been obtained by Sarıoğlu (2011) as well. Parental expectations sub-dimension involves unrealistically high standards set by parents for the individual (Frost et al., 1990). This study has not revealed any significant relationship between academic procrastination behavior and parental expectations. The fact that college students that have reached adulthood act in accordance with the targets that they themselves have set rather those set by their parents might lead them to push parental expectations to the background. Therefore, targets set by parents do not have a significant effect on the academic procrastination behavior of students.

This study has revealed a significant positive correlation between perception of parental criticism sub-dimension of perfectionism and academic procrastination behavior. This finding of the study is consistent with other studies (Frost et al., 1990; Kağan et al., 2010; Kandemir, 2010; Sarıoğlu, 2011). In the perception of parental criticism, an individual believes that low performance or mistakes are harshly criticized by his/her parents. From this point of view, individuals who believe that his/her mistakes or performance is criticized too harshly are more likely to display behavior of academic procrastination. According to Hewitt & Flett (1991, quotation: Özbay & Mısır-Taşdemir, 2003), unrealistic high standards, the value of which is determined by others and expectation of perfect performance might cause anxiety and frustration for individuals as they are perceived as extreme and uncontrollable. When parents make harsh criticisms, expecting perfect performances and when the criteria for the assessment of such performances are determined by those apart from the individual himself/herself, this can be considered as an external pressure. This perception of external pressure might manifest itself as academic procrastination behavior in the form of defiance against authority or rebellion.

A significant negative correlation has been revealed between the academic procrastination behavior of the students and high personal standards sub-dimension of perfectionism. In the study she has carried out, Sarıoğlu (2011) also identified a negative correlation between academic procrastination behavior and high personal standards sub-dimension. Frost et al., (1990) found out a negative correlation between high personal standards and the frequency of procrastination. According to these findings, when students set their own high standards, the frequency of academic procrastination decreases. Personal standards which are set by oneself in accordance with one’s needs and interests rather than those determined by others allows an individual to have inner-drive; that is, to be motivated. These personal standards set by the students are a source of motivation for the students to take action. Motivated by the desire to attain the standards they have set, students display more perseverance to study and less academic procrastination behavior. According to Slade & Owens (1998), the ambition to attain high standards is a positive aspect of perfectionism. They are of the opinion that the ambition to attain superordinate goals in positive perfectionism helps the individual consolidate his/her performance and increases his/her ambition to succeed. Flett, Hewitt & Martin (1995) have stated that when individuals face situations that require achievement, those who make
effort to attain superordinate goals tend to confront rather than avoid such a situation (quotation: Çakıcı, 2003:117).

Personal standards set by individuals may have a positive or negative impact on the motivation to study. For instance, if the personal standards set by the students are too low and easy to attain, this might lead to a decrease in motivation. On the other hand, when the personal standards are high yet realistic and attainable, they will allow individuals to have a high performance, increasing motivation. Within this context, it can be said that the high personal standards set by the students taking part in this study result in the students’ displaying fewer academic procrastination behaviors by providing motivation. If the personal standards that the students have set are too high to be attained, they can cause the students to display academic procrastination behaviors because the high personal standards which are beyond their capabilities results in fear of failure, causing a lower self-confidence level. Hannok (2011) explains that students that assume that they are devoid of the capability that will help them fulfill academic tasks successfully procrastinate their academic tasks due to the fear of failure. In addition, he also states that students with low self-esteem may avoid fulfilling the tasks they are given. The fact that individuals with low self-esteem and self-efficacy or fear of failure display academic procrastination behavior is supported by various studies (Aydoğan, 2008; Haycock, 1993; Haycock, McCarthy & Skay, 1998; Kandemir, 2010; Klassen, Krawchuk & Rajani, 2008; Rothblum, Solomon & Murakami, 1986; Senecal, Koestner & Vallendar, 1995; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Özer & Altun, 2011; Uzun-Ozer, 2010).

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