Research on the Current Situation of Undergraduates' Study Procrastination in Research Universities

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Abstract: By using questionnaire of study procrastination, this research aims to investigate the current situation of undergraduates’ study procrastination in Research University T in China. Results show that study procrastination is a relatively common phenomenon and especially in the task of exam review. 36.3% of the undergraduates show a high-level study procrastination and 42.8% of the undergraduates consider the study procrastination as a major obstacle for their study, 80.5% of the undergraduates hope to reduce this act of postponing. The study also shows the main factors of the study procrastination are study motivation and time management, and to cultivate undergraduates' study motivation and to improve the time management ability are the most effective way of intervention for study procrastination.

Introduction

American psychologist, Solomon and Rothblum in 1984, first proposed procrastination; they believed that the procrastination is due to the unnecessary delay in the execution or completion of the task, which resulting in a psychological discomfort behavior [1]. Over the next 30 years, procrastination has gradually become a main research content for psychology researchers. Procrastination is a complex behavior, which relates to personalities [2, 3], task properties [4] and task environment. The relevant survey has shown that 20% of adults have this kind of behavior every day; along with 50% of college students show a regular procrastination. It is a common phenomenon in daily life [5]. So far, the study of procrastination has been more focused on the students and in the substance of study, that is, in the field of study procrastination.

Traditional researches are more emphasis on the passive procrastination, which makes people feel extremely stressful in the final period of the task, brings psychological discomfort or emotional distress and affects academic performance (Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Stead, Shanahan, & Neufeld, 2010) [6, 7] also impacts on college students' learning and daily life badly [8]. Later, people found that the procrastination is not always negative; it may allow individuals to have more time to think, so as to make better decisions, and learning more efficient [9-11]. The concept of active procrastination enlarged the research field of procrastination. Ni (2012) [12] proposed a holistic model to integrate passive procrastination and active procrastination into the psychological response to the learning task, and put forward the prevention of passive procrastination, and promote the active procrastination.

Learning is the major task of undergraduates; a good study habit can affect their study and campus life, and then affect the quality of education in universities. In order to cultivate undergraduates’ self-learning ability and to enhance their learning gains, study procrastination in undergraduates must be highly concerned.

Methods

Test subject. Randomly selected undergraduates of Research University T in China as test samples for this survey, by using class unified surveying to approach to the test. In this study, a total of 236 questionnaires were sent out, including 25 parts invalid questionnaires and 215 valid questionnaires, with the effective rate is 91.1%. There are 140 male undergraduates and 75 female
undergraduates in this test. Also the amount of undergraduates in this survey from freshman to senior are 91, 76, 23 and 25, respectively takes 42.3%, 35.3%, 10.7% and 11.6% of the total number.

**Research tool.** To design this two-part questionnaire, using PASS (Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students) survey from Solomon and Rothblum (1984) as reference resource. The first part is designed to measure the level of study procrastination, the second part aims to find out the factors of study procrastination. Likert 5-point scaling method is used to describe the situation from 'totally inconsistent' to 'fully meet', and to score point from 1-5. SPSS21.0 statistical software is applied to statistical analysis of the questionnaire data.

**Results and discussions**

**Basic situation of undergraduates' study procrastination in Research Universities T**

Taking statistical analysis for exam review, assignments writing and academic management in Research University T to describe the general situation of study procrastination in undergraduates, the results are shown in table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of task</th>
<th>High procrastination (%)</th>
<th>High Disturbance (%)</th>
<th>High willingness to reduce (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam review</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment writing</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic management</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research shows that in these three types of tasks undergraduates who have no procrastination accounts for 12.1%, 7.4% and 23.8%. Meanwhile it reveals that study procrastination is a common phenomenon in undergraduates and the most serious study procrastination happens in exam review, where up to 36.3% of the undergraduates show a high procrastination, 42.8% of the undergraduates show the negative effects cause by study procrastination, also 80.5% of the undergraduates want to reduce this kind of procrastination phenomenon. Relatively, where undergraduates show the lowest procrastination is in academic management, 1/5 of the respondents show a high level of procrastination, but only 16.7% of them say the procrastination to bring them adverse effects. Usually, taking forms, course selection and other academic management tasks have clear time requirements, however study-relevant tasks as exam review and assignments writing are more autonomous. It can be seen from the scale of high-level study procrastination that higher autonomous tasks are more likely to bring higher study procrastination. Obviously, it is relatively weak in study autonomy of undergraduates, and learning abilities need to be further improved. The survey also finds that the procrastination brings higher level of distress. Most undergraduates would like to reduce their own situation of study procrastination, which indicates that, to a certain extent, undergraduates realize the negative impact to study and campus life, which are created by study procrastination and eager to solve this problem.

**Gender differences in undergraduates' study procrastination**

This study applies to independent-sample T test to compare the differences between male and female undergraduates' study procrastination, the results shown in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Procrastination Male</th>
<th>Procrastination Female</th>
<th>Procrastination t</th>
<th>Procrastination Male</th>
<th>Procrastination Female</th>
<th>Procrastination t</th>
<th>Willingness to reduce Male</th>
<th>Willingness to reduce Female</th>
<th>Willingness to reduce t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam review</td>
<td>3.03±1.21</td>
<td>3.00±1.16</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>3.26±1.35</td>
<td>3.34±1.00</td>
<td>-.95</td>
<td>4.08±1.29</td>
<td>4.47±.0.84</td>
<td>-2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment writing</td>
<td>3.21±1.08</td>
<td>2.91±1.16</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.98±1.22</td>
<td>3.07±1.13</td>
<td>-.68</td>
<td>3.94±1.26</td>
<td>4.32±0.95</td>
<td>-2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic management</td>
<td>2.53±1.21</td>
<td>2.36±1.07</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2.53±1.17</td>
<td>2.41±1.08</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.43±1.44</td>
<td>3.79±1.30</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study shows that there is no significant difference in two genders on study procrastination ($p>0.05$), but the level of procrastination in male undergraduates is higher than that of female undergraduates. Undergraduates experience more emotional distress caused by the procrastination in the exam review and assignments writing tasks, and in academic management tasks the procrastination level stays on or below the medium level. In the high autonomous tasks, the negative impact of procrastination on female undergraduates is higher than that of male undergraduates, but the difference between male and female undergraduates do not reach the level of significant difference ($p>0.05$). The scores of willingness to reduce procrastination in female undergraduates are higher than that of male undergraduates, while there is no significant difference ($p>0.05$). This may be more concerned with the female undergraduates are more focused on study achievements, have more serious study attitude, and have stronger self-discipline abilities, it is also indicates that female undergraduates are more likely to produce negative emotions in daily life.

**The grade difference of undergraduates' learning procrastination**

The level of total study procrastination in undergraduates of Research University T is increasing year by year, but there is no discrepancy in study procrastination level, study procrastination disturbance and willingness to reduce procrastination ($p>0.05$). This study further discusses the study procrastination of high autonomous task such as exam review and assignments writing; the results are shown in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Procrastination</th>
<th>Disturbance</th>
<th>Willingness to reduce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>2.95±1.04</td>
<td>3.18±1.04</td>
<td>4.25±0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3.08±0.91</td>
<td>3.25±1.11</td>
<td>4.02±1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3.21±1.22</td>
<td>3.20±1.25</td>
<td>3.93±1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.24±1.02</td>
<td>2.74±0.95</td>
<td>4.32±1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a significant difference among grades in the study procrastination of high autonomous task, the freshman has the lowest level of study procrastination, and significantly lower than the sophomore ($F=2.124, p<0.05$). This may be due to that first-year college students still keep good study habits that they obtained from high school in order to make them to do study preparation, review, and assignments on time. However, after the first year in college, as they gradually accustom to less supervision and restraint campus life, it shows a growing trend in the study procrastination. The most serious study procrastination happens in senior year, for there are few courses in this college year and in the last semester there will not be course assessment, all they need to do is to finish the graduation project or thesis, this low academic pressure brings higher study procrastination.

The most serious emotional distress shows in sophomore year, caused by study procrastination, and it is significantly higher than the seniors ($F=1.896, p<0.05$). This may be related to that after one year study in college they realize that the teachers will not assess the students at every lesson, so the tension of learning is reduced, which results in higher study procrastination. However, the heavy tasks in courses and colorful student club activities in the second year of college can make them realize the negative impact of the study procrastination, so as we can see from the results, the second year of college is the key period to act effective intervention for study procrastination.

**Factors of study procrastination in research university undergraduates**

Study subjects were asked to answer the situation of study procrastination during the final exam review and choose the factors of this procrastination in this research. Procrastination factors as task aversion, study motivation, low self-esteem, time management, and initiative delay were selected by the undergraduates in this study. According to the correlation analysis of the level in procrastination and its factors from undergraduates' self-reports of Research University T (Table 4), there is a significant positive correlation between those 5 factors and the study procrastination.
Table 4. The correlation analysis between the level of procrastination in self-report and its factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procrastination level</th>
<th>Task aversion</th>
<th>Study motivation</th>
<th>Low self-esteem</th>
<th>Time management</th>
<th>Initiative delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.293***</td>
<td>0.328***</td>
<td>0.221***</td>
<td>.0325***</td>
<td>.0158*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p<0.05\)  **\(p<0.01\)  ***\(p<0.001\)

Through the descriptive statistics of the factors for study procrastination of the undergraduates in Research University T, we can find out that task aversion and time management have the two highest scores while initiative delay holds the lowest ones. Although the final exam is very important for undergraduates, under the condition of being not like a task, the more anxiety they show, the more serious study procrastination they have [13]. At the same time, this result shows that the study procrastination of the undergraduates in Research University T is a passive one. Also, the gender differences in the factors of study procrastination were also investigated in this study, and among the 5 factors, there is not significantly difference (\(p>0.05\)).

The details of the impact from these five factors of study procrastination was further explored by using the regression analysis method, and it showed that there is a significant impact (\(p<0.05\)) between the level of study procrastination and motivation factor and time management factor. From which result, we can see that the main reasons for study procrastination in undergraduates are lack of study motivation and time management ability. The same results can be found in another similar research; previous studies also show that laziness and time management can be the main factors for the procrastination in study[14,15]. Undergraduates who have strong study motivation will devote more time and energy to study activities, which can effectively reduce the study procrastination, and then there will be more educational gains. Study is the major but not the only task in college life, undergraduates complete courses while they need to deal with complex relationships and participate in club activities to develop a wide range of alibies. Time coordination can seriously affect the academic time and lead to study procrastination. When the intensity of motivation in exam review is less than the motivation intensity of other activities, procrastination is not only caused by the lack of motivation, but also due they try to engage more in other actives such as sports, social to get more satisfaction. Therefore, cultivating and stimulating undergraduates' study motivation and improving their time management ability are the most effective interventions for study procrastination.

Summary

Taking the undergraduates of Research University T in China as test samples to study the current situation and the factors of undergraduates’ study procrastination, this research shows that study procrastination is a common behavior in undergraduates and due to the reasons of lack of motivation and poor time management. The study shows that the most serious study procrastination happens in the high-autonomous academic aspects and this kind of procrastination can bring undergraduates’ emotional distress. This study also suggests that most of the undergraduates show a willingness to reduce study procrastination. As the study procrastination extents as the grade becomes higher, the best time to layout effective intervention is during the sophomore year in college.

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References


