



Fear of Failure, Procrastination and Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract : Understanding the complex relationship between the fear of failure, procrastination, and academic performance is of paramount importance, not only from an individual standpoint but also in the context of institutional success and societal development. As Indian colleges and universities strive to foster environments that promote holistic growth, addressing these psychological challenges can lead to enhance student well-being, reduce self-harm rates, improve retention rates, and ultimately, better academic as well as personal outcomes. The study aims to be an inclusive approach in studying the three variables playing a role in the life of students in higher education. The research aspires to

contribute to the advancing domain of mental health and academic performance, addressing the importance of psychological well-being alongside intellectual development. The data was gathered from 120 samples (48 males and 72 females) and was thoroughly analysed to find the correlation between Fear of failure and procrastination, Procrastination and academic performance. The study did not find any significant gender differences in Fear of Failure and Procrastination.

Keywords: Fear of Failure (FoF), Procrastination, Academic Performance, Undergraduate students, Gender.

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Introduction:

Fear of failure can be defined as a measure of fear of the aversive consequences of not reaching one's goals (Steinberg, Teevan & Greenfeld, 1983). It has been found to include fear of self-devaluation, social devaluation, and non-ego punishment (e.g., losing rewards).

The researchers have argued that fear of failure must assess “how strongly individuals believe or anticipate that certain aversive consequences will occur when they perceive that they are failing” (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969; Conroy, 2001; Lazarus, 1991). Five dimensions of fear of failure were identified (Conroy, Willow, & Metzler, 2002): fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fear of devaluing one's self-esteem, fear of having an uncertain future, fear of

important others losing interest, and fear of upsetting important others.

Fear of failure has been described as a general, higher order motivational tendency (Elliot & McGregor, 1999), which also selects and directs achievement activity, but is oriented towards avoidance of failure (Elliot & McGregor, 1999, McClelland, 1989).

Procrastination is a common tendency among individuals where they unnecessarily delay or postpone tasks they need to complete. Investigators have defined procrastination as the behavioral tendency to postpone what is necessary to reach a goal (Ellis & Knaus, 1979). It is a complex process that involves affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Fee & Tangney, 2000).

In an academic context, students often face various responsibilities such as writing term papers, preparing for exams, completing assignments, handling academic administrative tasks, and participating in different activities (Kachgal, Hansen, & Nutter, 2001). However, there has been found a tendency among students to delay these important tasks to a later time, which is referred to as academic procrastination. Procrastination is increasingly recognized as involving a failure in self-regulation where procrastinators may have a reduced ability to resist social temptations, pleasurable activities, and immediate rewards when the benefits of academic preparation are distant as compared to non-procrastinators (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Chu & Choi, 2005; Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002). Associated characteristics included reduced agency, disorganization, poor impulse and emotional control, poor planning and goal setting, reduced use of metacognitive skills to monitor and control learning behavior, distractibility, poor task persistence, time and task management deficiencies, and an intention– action gap (Dewitte & Lens, 2000; Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002; Tan et al., 2008; Wolters, 2003).

Academic achievement in the field of education is a special level of achievement. This is the result of expertise in academic work that is assessed by teachers, through standardized tests, or through a combination of the techniques. It encompasses the outcomes and accomplishments of students in their learning journey, reflecting their mastery of knowledge, skills, and competencies within the academic domain.

The key determinants of performance in academics are in multitude, quite complex and often interconnected.

College students face many, varied sources of academic stress, including demonstrating an ability to engage with challenging material under time pressures. This could compound the realization that they may not have acquired optimal learning and thinking strategies (Kariv & Heiman, 2005). Solomon and Rothblum (1984) identified three areas that are most likely to involve task avoidance—writing term papers, reading weekly assignments, and studying for exams. The students are facing issues of procrastination and fear of failure which may influence their academic achievement. This study aims to investigate the relationship among the three variables among the college students.

Objectives:

Based on the observations, the study adopts the following objectives to:

1. Find the prevalence of fear of failure and procrastination among undergraduate students.
2. Investigate the relationships between fear of failure, procrastination, and academic performance among undergraduate students.
3. Investigate the differences between high and low achievers on fear of failure and procrastination.
4. Find the gender differences in fear of failure and procrastination among undergraduate students.
5. Explore the coping mechanisms and strategies employed by the undergraduate students.

Hypotheses:

Based on the objectives, following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Fear of failure will be significantly negatively related to academic performance among undergraduate students.
2. Procrastination will be significantly negatively related to academic performance among undergraduate students.

3. There will be significant gender difference in fear of failure among undergraduate students.
4. There will be significant gender difference in procrastination among undergraduate students.

Research Questions:

1. Which type of procrastination, active or passive, is prevalent among undergraduate students?
2. What are the coping mechanisms employed by the undergraduate students?
3. What is the level of Fear of Failure present in the undergraduate student?

Method of Study:

Sample: The sample consisted of 120 people of which 48 were males and 72 were females of age range 18 – 24 years from various colleges of Patna. The sampling method used was purposive sampling.

Tools used: The Following scales were used for collection of data:

Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student (PASS): The Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) was administered to assess students' procrastination tendency. The reliability was reported to be .80 using test-retest correlation. The instrument consisted of a total of 44 items in two sections. The first section (18 items) was used in this study and measures the prevalence of procrastination across six academic domains: writing a term paper, studying for examinations, keeping up with weekly reading assignments, performing administrative tasks, attending meetings, and performing school activities in general.

Active Procrastination Scale (APS): The 16-item Active Procrastination Scale (APS) (Choi & Moran, 2009) was administered to assess four defining characteristics of active procrastination including outcome satisfaction (four items, $\alpha=.89$), preference for pressure (four items, $\alpha=.93$), intentional decision (four items, $\alpha=.85$) and ability to meet deadlines (four items, $\alpha=.85$). Higher scores signify active procrastination.

Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory

(PFAI): It is a multidimensional measure of cognitive-motivational-relational appraisals associated with fear of failure developed by Conroy in 2001. It has 25 items measuring five appraisal factors. The five factors assessed by the PFAI included (a) experiencing shame and embarrassment (FSE, $\alpha=0.85$), (b) devaluing one's self-estimate (FDSE, $\alpha=0.89$), (c) having an uncertain future (FUF, $\alpha=0.94$), (d) important others losing interest (FIOLI, $\alpha=0.85$), and (e) upsetting important others (FUIO, $\alpha=0.88$).

Research design: The present study was non-experimental study employing field study method of hypothesis testing type.

Procedure of data collection: The data was collected using a survey method. The participants were contacted and an introduction to the measures was given first. The target respondent was explained about the study and with the consent of the respondent, the data were collected using paper pencil test. Ethical procedures like informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were practiced throughout the research procedure. The data collection was collected within one month between November and December 2023.

Result and Discussions:

Hypothesis 1. “Fear of failure will be significantly negatively related to academic performance among undergraduate students”.

Table 1

Variables	N	r	Significance
Fear of Failure (FoF)	120	- .037	p > .05
Academic Achievement	120		
Table value at df 118 is 0.164 (.05 level, one-tailed)			

The obtained 'r' value indicates not significant negative correlation (-0.37 , $p \geq .05$) between FoF and academic achievement among the students of higher education. Hence, Hypothesis no.1 is not accepted.

The result indicates that high Fear of Failure is related to low academic achievement, but it is not

significant. The negative relationship between fear of failure and academic achievement has been indicated by the findings by Imran and others (2023). They reported in their study that fear of failure has a direct and significant effect on the poor academic performance and academic failure of students. In the study of Subhan, Faizal, and Rina (2023) also, it was found that the fear of failure contributes to academic procrastination among students, which can negatively relate to their academic performance.

Hypothesis 2. “Procrastination will be significantly negatively related to academic performance among undergraduate students.”

Table 2

Variables	N	r	Significance
Procrastination	120	-0.004	p > .05
Academic Achievement	120		
Table value at df 118 is 0.164 (.05 level, one-tailed)			

The obtained r value indicated insignificant negative correlation (-0.004) between Procrastination and Academic Achievement among students of higher education. Hence, the Hypothesis 2 is not accepted.

In their study, Doller and others (2023) found no significant relationship between academic procrastination and students' academic achievement. In the study by Janssen (2015), no effect or relationship between academic procrastination and academic achievement among undergraduate students was found.

Hypothesis 3. “There will be significant gender difference in fear of failure among undergraduate students.”

Table 3

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Significance
Fear of Failure (FoF)	Male	48	76.27	18.96	0.837	118	p>0.05
	Female	72	73.30	19.03			
Table value at df 118 is 1.984 (.05 level, two-tailed)							

The t-test between male and female undergraduate students on fear of failure is calculated to be 0.837 (p>0.05) along with df 118, which is not significant even at .05 level. Thus, there is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate

students in Fear of Failure. Hence, hypothesis 3 is not accepted. Henceforth, this indicates that there is no significant gender difference in Fear of Failure among undergraduate students.

Hypothesis 4. “There will be significant gender difference in procrastination among undergraduate students”.

The t-test between male and female undergraduate students on procrastination is calculated to be 0.394 (p>0.05) along with df 118, which is insignificant even at .05 level. Thus, there is no significant difference between male and female sample in procrastination. Hence, Hypothesis is not accepted. Henceforth, this indicates that there is no significant gender difference in procrastination among undergraduate students.

Table 4

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Significance
Procrastination	Male	48	125.45	21.44	0.394	118	p>0.05
	Female	72	123.75	24.39			
Table value at df 118 is 1.984 (.05 level, two-tailed)							

The findings of the research questions are discussed as below:

1. Which type of procrastination, active or passive, is prevalent among undergraduate students?

According to the Fig. 1, the result shows the prevalence of active procrastinators to be 50.8% and passive procrastinators to be 49.1%. Female displayed high procrastination in both active (57.3%) and passive (62.7%) procrastination than male displaying active (42.6%) and passive (37.2%).

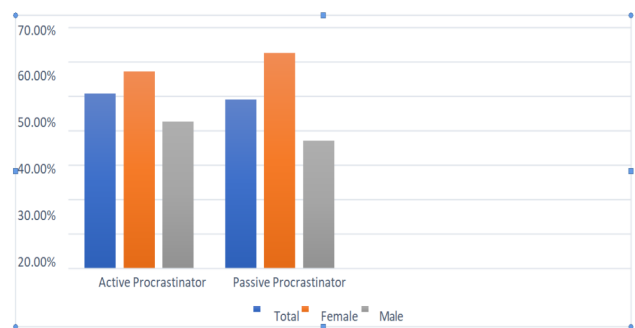
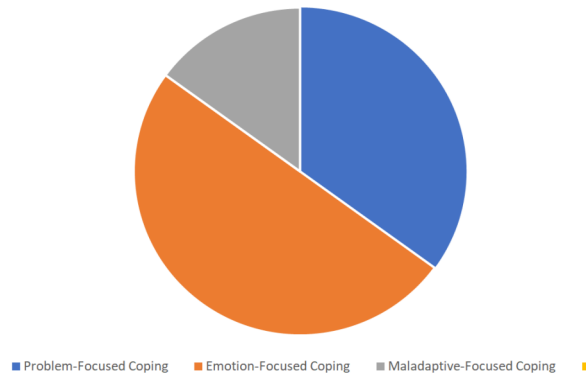


Fig. 1

2. What are the coping mechanisms employed by undergraduate students?

In the self-report survey, the 66% undergraduate students including both male and female, responded to their coping mechanism while dealing with Fear of Failure. The result is displayed in Fig. 2.



It was found that majorly students were engaged in Emotion-Focused Coping for Fear of Failure (50%), where they were majorly dependent on peer support, family support, drawn towards motivational videos or lectures and some of the cases internal or self-motivation. Example of some responses are like [“...I call my friends to calm myself”; “...I watch motivational videos on YouTube”].

Responses that link to Problem-Focused coping, were also displayed resulting in (35%), and included responses like, studying for excessive hours, looking for notes and preparation tips and opting for last minute guidance. Example of some responses are like [“...I study for longer hours and give my full effort, because I can't take the cost of failing”; “...I ask for notes and tips from my professors”].

According to the responses, (15%) students were engaged in Maladaptive Coping, where they opt for behaviours of giving up, absenteeism, engaging in venting techniques or even smoking. Example of some responses are like [“... When I feel I can't do anything, I simply depend on luck; “...I smoke to calm myself because nothing helps except that”].

3. What is the level of Fear of Failure present among undergraduate students?

Using the scale Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) developed by Conroy (2001), the result displayed that 41.3% displayed high level of Fear of Failure, 34.16% average level, and 25% displayed low level.

Conclusion:

The study aimed at finding the relationship among fear of failure, procrastination, and academic performance among the undergraduate students. The study also attempted to find the gender difference in the variables. The first and second hypotheses about the relationship among the variables were found to be statistically insignificant even at 0.05 level. In the third and fourth hypotheses, the results indicate no significant gender difference found in fear of failure and procrastination respectively. The prevalence of active and passive procrastination among undergraduate students is found to be nearly equal with 50.8% active procrastination and passive procrastinators to be 49.1%, with female being high in both active and passive procrastination than male.

Keeping in mind the findings, the following suggestions can be made for educational institutions. Teachers may identify fear of failure among students with low academic achievement and counsel accordingly. There is the need to explore strategies and interventions that educators can implement in the classroom to help students overcome fear of failure and procrastination, ultimately enhancing academic performance. The future study can include larger and diversified sample and different measures for the variables.

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