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Investigating the Predictive Roles of Perceived Stress, Valuing, Cognitive Defusion, and Mindfulness on Academic Procrastination: An Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Perspective

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Problem Statement

Academic procrastination, defined as the intentional delay of academic tasks despite knowing the potential negative outcomes (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016), is prevalent among university students, with over 70% regularly engaging in this behavior (Klingsieck et al., 2013). Various studies have identified negative consequences of academic procrastination, such as heightened anxiety and depression, poorer physical health, reduced well-being, and decreased academic performance (Kim & Seo, 2015; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Researchers have also explored its antecedents to develop strategies for overcoming it. Klingsieck (2013) suggests that the research on antecedents of procrastination can be organized into four key perspectives: differential psychology, motivational and volitional psychology, clinical psychology, and situational perspective. The differential psychology perspective views procrastination as a personality trait related to traits like conscientiousness and neuroticism, while the motivational and volitional psychology perspective connects it to motivation, goal orientation, self-control, and time management (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016). Clinical psychology links procrastination to anxiety, depression, and personality disorders, whereas the situational perspective attributes it to contextual factors like task and teacher characteristics (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016).

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) offers a unique perspective on academic procrastination by emphasizing the psychological flexibility model. This model encompasses six interconnected processes, each existing on a spectrum from flexibility to inflexibility: acceptance vs. experiential avoidance, cognitive defusion vs. cognitive fusion, self-as-context vs. conceptualized-self, present-focused attention vs. past/future orientation, clear values vs. unclear values, and committed action vs. inaction/impulsivity (Hayes et al., 2012). Experiential avoidance, identified by Hayes et al. (2012) as a core pathological process in psychopathology, involves avoiding uncomfortable thoughts, emotions, and sensations, often leading to counterproductive behavior. Within this context, academic procrastination can be viewed as a cognitive fusion with internal experiences, alongside the reliance on experiential avoidance as a strategy for short-term mood regulation, ultimately resulting in negative long-term consequences for students (Gagnon et al., 2016). Recent research has revealed significant relationships between certain constructs of the psychological flexibility model and academic procrastination. Studies have shown an inverse relationship between stress and procrastination (Ma et al., 2023). Similarly, research revealed that greater levels of mindfulness are linked to reduced procrastination, though some studies report no significant link (Cheung & Ng, 2019; Schutte & Del Pozo De Bolger, 2020). However,

research on other key concepts of the psychological flexibility model, such as cognitive defusion and values, is limited. Gagnon et al. (2016) found that cognitive defusion did not significantly predict procrastination. Additionally, Glick et al. (2014) reported that while acceptance, mindfulness, and values collectively contributed to predicting procrastination beyond the influence of anxiety, none of these constructs individually predicted procrastination among university students.

Based on the existing literature, the main purpose of the current study is to examine the predictor roles of perceived stress, valuing (progress and obstruction), cognitive defusion, and mindfulness on Turkish university students' academic procrastination. There is mounting interest in applying the psychological flexibility model of ACT within university settings and counseling centers (Gagnon et al., 2016). If key psychological processes central to the psychological flexibility model are associated with academic procrastination, these findings could have significant implications for utilizing ACT interventions to address this issue among university students.

Method

The current correlational study used convenience sampling to recruit undergraduate students over the age of 18 in Türkiye. The final sample comprised 308 undergraduate students after data cleaning and outlier check. Among these, 206 were female (66.9%), 99 were male (32.1%), one identified as non-binary (0.3%), and two identified with another gender (0.6%). The sample included 37 freshmen (12%), 114 sophomores (37%), 49 juniors (15.9%), and 107 seniors (34.7%). The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 33 years (M = 22.34, SD = 2.04).

In the current study, six data collection instruments were utilized. These were Tuckman Procrastination Scale (Tuckman, 1991; Uzun Özer et al., 2013), Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983; Çelik-Örücü & Demir, 2009), Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Özyeşil et al., 2011), Drexel Defusion Scale (Forman et al., 2012; Aydın & Yerin-Güneri, 2021), Valuing Questionnaire (Smout et al., 2014; Aydın & Aydın, 2021), and demographic information form. The study received approval from the Trakya University Human Subjects Ethics Committee on March 27, 2024. Data were collected using an online survey platform, METU Survey, and distributed through social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) and classroom settings. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided informed consent.

Before the primary analysis, a set of preliminary analyses, including data screening, missing values and outliers check, assumptions check for multiple regression analysis, descriptive analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis, were performed. Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to verify the factor structures of each data collection instrument, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to check the reliability. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive roles of perceived stress, valuing (progress and obstruction), cognitive defusion, and mindfulness on academic procrastination.

Expected/Temporary Results

Prior to conducting the primary analysis, the assumptions of multiple regression analysis, including sample size, multivariate outliers, normally distributed errors, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, linearity, multicollinearity, and normality, as outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), were examined. The results indicated that all assumptions were met, with no violations detected. Results of Pearson's correlation coefficients revealed that all correlations were significant. Perceived stress ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$), progress ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$), cognitive defusion ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = -.39$, $p < .01$) were shown to be negatively correlated with academic procrastination, whereas obstruction ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) was shown to be positively correlated with academic procrastination. According to the results of the multiple regression analysis, the predictors accounted for 31% of the variance ($R2 = .55$, $F (5;307) = 735.12$, $p < .01$). Among all predictors, progress ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .01$), obstruction ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$), and mindfulness ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of academic procrastination. In contrast, perceived stress and cognitive defusion did not significantly predict academic procrastination among Turkish university students.

Keywords: Academic procrastination, acceptance and commitment therapy, perceived stress, valuing, cognitive defusion, mindfulness

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