Identifying the Causes of Academic Procrastination from the Perspective of Male Middle School Male Students

Niloofar Esmaeili¹
Morteza Monadi²

Abstract

Academic procrastination is a serious problem in the educational environment, and the causes of its emergence have long been of interest to psychologists. Given the prevalence of academic procrastination in college students and its numerous subsequent negative effects, this article seeks to explore the antecedent causes of procrastination among middle school students. The current research was conducted through a qualitative approach using interviews and content analysis. Fifteen male students enrolled in middle school in the 2014-2015 academic years were selected based on purposive sampling, and they were interviewed during fifteen sessions. In analyzing the interview manuscripts, five themes were extracted. Major themes obtained in the study on the causes of procrastination among middle school students include the number of hours of attendance at school; role of parents and their use of positive and negative reinforcements; a sense of competition, and peer influence; fear of failure (perfectionism); and a preference for immediate factors over delayed ones. The most important causes of academic procrastination, given extracted categories, include the psycho-emotional, cognitive-behavioral, and contextual dimensions of each student and their underlying individual differences.

Keywords: Academic procrastination, parenting styles, reinforcement, competitiveness, perfectionism.

¹ PhD student of Educational Psychology at the Alzahra University
² Associate Professor of Educational Psychology Department at the Alzahra University
Introduction and Problem Statement

Procrastination affects millions of people and is a detrimental problem which frequently affects individual productivity and well-being (Sirois, Melia-Gordon & Pychyl, 2003; Steele, 2007; Stead, Shanahan & Neufeld, 2010). Academic procrastination, largely regarded as a bad habit, is an important issue that has been of interest to many researchers in recent years, (Chase, 2003) and is seen as a behavioral problem that many adults experience in their regular work (Johnson & Carton, 1999), especially in tasks that must be done in a certain time period (Oweini & Harraty, 2001, as cited in Akinsola, Kolawole Adedeji & Tella, 2007). Procrastination on academic tasks is a common problem among middle school students and college students, and it is one of the most significant causes of students’ failure to learn and to achieve academic success (Balkis, Duru & Duru, 2009; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984).

The term procrastination is composed of two parts: “pro” in sense of “forward” and “crastinus” meaning “tomorrow” and “until tomorrow” (Steele, 2005). The word is derived from Latin term “procrastinare” meaning to “put off, delay, prolong, defer, and stall” (Rosario, Costa, Nunez, Gonzalez-Pienda, Solano & Valle, 2009). Something that preferably should be done now, will be postponed to the future. Shraw, Wadkins & Olfason (2007) define procrastination as a deliberate delay in taking action or fulfilling a task. When all definitions of procrastination are compared, consensus is that procrastination is an action or behavior that is not beneficial for the person engaged in it (Balkis, Duru & Duru, 2009).

The body of research conducted in this area indicates a high incidence of procrastination across social classes, especially among youth and adolescents. It is estimated that 95 percent of youth and adolescents experience procrastination at some point (Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Steele, 2007), and it has a high degree of prevalence at various educational levels (Hariot and Ferrari, 1996).

Procrastination can influence various aspects of life and has objectively important outcomes such as poor academic performance (Hussaein and Sultan, 2010; Michinov, Brunot, Bohec, Juhel & Delaval, 2011); lower scores and lack of participation or inactive participation in classes and class discussions (Michinov et al, 2011); insufficient effort for success (Savler & Bass, 1999); anxiety (Milgram & Tobiana, 1999; Ferrari, 1991); dependence, fear of failure, hatred of work, lack of energy (Solomon & Ruthblum, 1984); perfectionism (Johnson & Celany, 1986); negative evaluation and low self-esteem (Ferrari, Callaghan & Newbegin, 2005); learned helplessness (McCain, 1994); avoidance of goal orientation (Heidari, 2011); inferiority complex, low levels of action and anger (Jokar & Delavarpoo, 2008). The most prominent effect of procrastination is weak individual performance that interferes with organizational performance (Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002). The procrastination construct certainly has an impact on academic performance and academic achievement (Troia, 2010).

Educational practitioners and scholars have long considered academic failure and dropping out of school to be major obstacles in the way of achieving the goals of an education systems.
Measures taken by scientists, researchers and all members of society have aimed at developing individuals who can influence the future of the family, society and even the world. Due to the importance of education, it appears that the studies of students and individual variables, such as procrastination and progression motivation, are of vital significance (Ozer, 2010). Development of extensive knowledge about students and their demands, would make it possible to provide the educational system and students with more effective planning, categorization, prioritization, and development of objectives and actions, and prevent the waste of human and financial capitals. Thus, because of its profound effects on academic achievement, attempts to analyze procrastination are of vital importance, to prevent mental damages (Flett et al., 2012) and academic failure, to utilize students’ maximum mental capacities, and to enhance self-esteem. The issue has not been sufficiently addressed in previous studies.

Preceding studies on the procrastination phenomenon have been mostly focused on students. Despite the consequences of procrastination, only a limited number of studies have been done on this subject in Iran. Some of these domestic studies include the research conducted by Karim Savari (2012) that examined the prevalence of academic procrastination in male and female students (155 boys and 1045 girls) of Ahvaz PNU, showing that the prevalence of procrastination among female students was 17.3 percent, and among male students was 17.8 percent. Shahni, Yaylaqi and et al. (2007) reported that the prevalence of procrastination among the Ahvaz student community was 15.4% (17% among boys and 14% among girls). As teenagers spend most of their time in school (Rosario et al., 2009), more research needs to be carried out to provide some strategies for diminishing the rate of academic procrastination and increasing student motivation, thus helping them to progress further. In addition, by exploring the causes of procrastination among the students at lower levels (middle school), it may be possible to avoid wasted time and energy in high school and at the graduate level. Using a qualitative method based on deep interviews, the current research seeks to identify the factors affecting academic procrastination among middle school male students.

Research objectives

Academic procrastination does not initiate at once, and identical to any other process, is constituted of a starting point, subsequent evolutions, and final results. This study aims to explore and achieve a better understanding of academic procrastination in the early academic years, and, subsequently, to present useful strategies to diminish it.

Research questions

- From the perspective of students, what is educational procrastination?
- What element or elements contributes to homework procrastination on the part of students?
- What elements motivate students to postpone study for exams?
Theoretical Foundation

At first, those who did perform research on procrastination focused more on its behavioral characteristics, and considered procrastination as avoidance from fulfilling a specific task (Schuenborg, 2005). Some researchers (Zarik & Stonbriker, 2009) considered procrastination to be a personal weakness. As theoretical views on procrastination have changed, numerous studies have sought to identify multi-dimensional views of this important construct (Ferrari, 2000; Steele, 2003; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Procrastination has covered a wide range of research titles and priorities, and its relationship with mental disorders such as depression (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) and anxiety (Malous, 2002) in conjunction with academic activities has been confirmed (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984).

In this study, we intend to present a comprehensive view of all aspects of the complex phenomenon of academic procrastination. Based on the theory of Freudian psychoanalysis, academic procrastination basically is a result of anxiety (Freud, 1953, as cited in Jaradt, 2004). Anxiety is a warning sign for repressed unconscious desires of the “self”. As soon as the “self” recognizes anxiety, it ready to take a defensive stance. Based on dynamic defensive mechanisms and avoidance of task assignments, incomplete tasks have primarily been abandoned because they are a threat to the “self”. In the school of psychoanalysis, any mental disorder is associated with certain defense mechanisms. Another important factor affecting academic procrastination is parenting style. Each family adopts a specific practice in their child's personal and social education, influenced by cultural, social, political, economic, and other factors (Hardey et al., 1993).

Parenting style encompasses parents’ attitudes towards children leading to formation of an emotional atmosphere in which parents exhibit certain behaviors, including goal-directed behaviors that translate into parenting practices. In fact, parenting is a complex activity that has a profound effect on children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, as cited in Aslami, 2007).

In the field of parenting style, several theories have been proposed. Symonds (1939) regarded parenting style dimensions as acceptance/rejection and dominance/submission, and Schaeffer (1959) regarded them as love/hostility, possession/control (Aslami, 2007). Some of the major theories in the field of parenting are presented as below.

One of the most important of these theories is that proposed by Baumrind that defines three parenting styles: authoritarian, easy-going, and authoritative. These three styles differ in terms of two characteristics: the degree of attention paid to the child or affection felt by him, and the extent of control over the child's behavior and activity (Dwiry et al., 2006). Baumrind believes that the authoritative parenting style is associated with a high level of emotional support, close relationships, and providing child with proper autonomy tailored to his merits (Strage & Brandt, 1999). A key difference between authoritarian and authoritative parents is in the area of
psychological control. Both of them expect the children to behave appropriately and obey parental rules. However, although authoritarian parents expect children to accept their judgments, values, and goals without any question and excuse, authoritative parents are interested in verbal interaction with their children, and present more details about their expectations (Barber, 1996).

In this paper, Alfred Adler's theory is used to explain the findings. Adler is one of the theorists practicing in the area of parenting style. Stein (2002, cited in Sayyad Shirazi, 2004) has added some points to Adler’s vision. Behaviorists explain procrastinating behavior based on the environment and previous experiences. Children have learned to procrastinate in completing their training assignments (especially if assignments are unpleasant), and direct their attention to other activities that seem attractive to them (Jaradat, 2004). One way to explain procrastination is habit family hierarchy and Hull's unlearned behaviour (Hull, 1952). “Whatever reinforce a link in a behavioral chain take place later, the link’s power to elicit a desired respond to that stimulus would be weaker.” (Hull, 1952, p. 32). In fact, this principle reminds us that in any learning situation, there are many possible responses, and the response with the highest probability is the one that achieves reinforcement most promptly, and demands the least effort (Olson & Hargenhan, 1976). Hull's analysis of unlearned behavior suggests that learning is necessary only when the intrinsic neural mechanisms and associated responses fail to reduce an organism's need. In general, as long as intrinsic responses are previously learned and play effective parts in fulfilling needs, there is no reason to learn new responses. The advocates of cognitive theory, see the roots of procrastinating behavior in irrational beliefs. Learners who base their value on their ability to perform tasks may take irrational actions, and avoid completing tasks, thus assessing their own actual ability to do homework (Jaradat, 2004). Many cognitive features like waiting for a definite success (Bercka and Yuen, 1983; as cited in Bainder 2000), irrational beliefs (Fellot et al., 1992), and fear of failure (Solomon and Rathblum, 1984) are seen in perfectionist and negligent people.

In summary, it can be said that psychoanalytic, behavioristic, cognitive, and contextual theories each present different interpretations of the complex and inclusive process of procrastination, and address the psycho-emotional and cognitive-behavioral dimensions of procrastination. In the interviews conducted in the current research, each student pointed to these dimensions, indicating the interaction among the psycho-emotional-behavioral aspects of procrastination. Thus, for analyzing educational procrastination, taking all these aspects into account is essential.

**Research Methodology**
Given the objectives of the current research, a qualitative approach was chosen. Cognition of different opinions in our society would be better possible with tools such as interviews or observation, because people offer clearer responses without having too much time to think and
provide stereotypicale replies (Monadi, 2006). Qualitative research “is a set of activities (such as observation, interviews, extensive participation in research activities) that help researchers obtain first-hand information about the research topic” (Monadi, 2014, p. 125). According to (Monadi, 2014, p. 130), “Qualitative research is essentially composed of several methods and adopts an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the topic under study. This means that qualitative researchers study the objects in their natural situations, and attempt to conceptualize or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people give them.”

Monadi (2014), identifies several special features of the qualitative approach. The research objective is not hypothesis testing; therefore, we have not taken any structured hypothesis into account, either before or during the research. However, according to Bates (1996), “there is not any researcher in any field of science that initiates its research as an unwritten tablet.” As a result, we have assumed some hypotheses in advance and presented them as part of the ‘statement of the problem’. 2) The qualitative method does not cover an extensive statistical community. 3) The qualitative method does not utilize standard tests and questionnaires. 4) The qualitative method does not seek to test or implement a specific theory in the environment. Of course, in qualitative research, including the current research, after collecting data to understand and explain the results, we utilized and expressed a set of theories in the theoretical framework.

In qualitative research, the researcher is interested in understanding how people conceptualize their worlds and personal experiences (Merriam, 2009). Some methods such as cooperative observation and case studies that lead to a narrative are used (Parkinson and Drislane, 2011). Qualitative research consists of a series of interpretative measures that make the world understandable. Qualitative research methods represent the world in the form of collections, including field notes, interviews, discussions, photos, sounds and recorded images, and notes. Qualitative research is a natural and interpretative approach to the world, through which qualitative researchers study the phenomena in their natural conditions, and seek to understand and interpret phenomena in the same way that people explore and understand them (Parkinson and Drislane, 2005).

Today, almost all humanities and social sciences, including psychology, are related to performance, symbols, meanings, and messages. In recent years, with the emergence of the information society, texts, backgrounds, images, links, and more importantly, the information they contain are widely reviewed and analyzed (Krippendorf, 2004). Content analysis is a method that can be used to describe any text. “Content analysis is a research technique for reproducible and valid inferences from texts or other significant materials in the context in which they are used” (Krippendorff, 2004,p. 18). In other words, content analysis is an analytical approach based on the identification and determination of the major indications of a text, both verbal and visual elements, and a review of the relationship between such elements. Because
special meaning can be allocated to frequent verbal or visual elements, it would be possible to understand basic yet embedded messages in the text.

**Research sample**
The research population for this study is male middle school students (Fifteenth grade). A purposive sample was used for the sample community. In this sampling, the limited number of participants was strictly in accordance with the terms of the research topic (Monadi, Abedi, and Talebzadeh Shoushtari, 2015). In fact, in purposive sampling, “the researcher specifies the characteristics of the desired population and finds people with such characteristics” (Mohammadpour, 2014). After talking with three of the teachers practicing at this educational level (social sciences, mathematics and Arabic), five students with the tendency to academic procrastination and two students with a only relative tendency to academic procrastination were chosen.

**Tools and procedures for data collection and analysis**
In the current research, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Accordingly, the questions were pre-designed with the aim of receiving deep information from the interviewees. However, every question was followed by a number of other questions, and the respondents were asked to provide more explanation of their replies, to obtain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon under study. First, a couple of questions were proposed, and after performing two experimental interviews, the questions were modified and completed, and inserted in the questionnaire. The formal validity of the questions was confirmed through consultation with academic professors in the fields of sociology and psychology, and, given the qualitative nature of the research, and the fact that the main aim was not to generalize the results, the issue of reliability was not raised (Monadi, 2007). The interviews were conducted after presenting some explanations about the purpose of the interview. Interviews took place in one of the rooms of the school that the participants attended. All the interviews were recorded after obtaining consent from the interviewees, and transcribed exactly, word by word. For data analysis, content analysis was used. We first studied the text, then provided a general interpretation of the text and its relationship with all the questions. Third, we began detailed analysis of each response separately. For this purpose, the keywords of the text were identified in order to specify text format, and to explore the original thinking of the speaker. In the end, after terms were collected, we, classified and counted them. After putting together the key terms, students’ thinking and views were sought. In addition, in the analyses, the subjects’ tone and behaviors (e.g., being calm or anxious) were also taken into account (Monadi, 2006).
Table 1: Information pertinent to the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee’s Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>18 Min &amp; 27 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>15 Min &amp; 11 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>11 Min &amp; 50 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>13 Min &amp; 11 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>30 Min &amp; 13 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>12 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>14 Min &amp; 10 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>15 Min &amp; 16 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>20 Min &amp; 12 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>17 Min &amp; 14 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>16 Min &amp; 7 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>30 Min &amp; 15 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>18 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>19 Min &amp; 55 Sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>12 Min &amp; 17 Sec</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the data obtained are related to one of Tehran's private schools (District 2), and average income of the families registered in the school is 1,500 dollar annually.

Findings

In the present study we wanted to examine the factors influencing academic procrastination. For this purpose, without any presupposition and by doing deep interviews, we searched for the factors that lead students to procrastinating behaviors. An important qualitative characteristic was lack of a consistent, clear, and structured hypothesis. This does not mean that research conducted by a qualitative researcher lacks any hypothesis. On the contrary, we entered into the field of research with very detailed information and knew what we were looking for, even though our hypothesis was not structured. What we obtained based on students’ statements was built upon their emphasis, indicating the importance of each mentioned factor. In the present study, students emphasized five major factors that affected the incidence of academic procrastination, including: the times of school attendance (context); the role of father (mother) and their use of positive and negative promoters; sense of competition and peer influence; fear of failure (perfectionism); and, preferring prompting factors over delaying ones. The results are given in Table 2.
Table 2: Factors influencing the emergence of academic procrastination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hours of presence in the school and school environment</td>
<td>15 students (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The role of parents and use of negative and positive reinforcements</td>
<td>15 students (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sense of competition and peer influence</td>
<td>11 students (73.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fear of failure (perfectionism)</td>
<td>9 students (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preferring immediate over delayed reinforcement</td>
<td>6 students (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that given the qualitative nature of the research and the small size of the sample group, it is not possible to generalize the results to the entire teenage community. Our intent was to gain a deeper understanding of procrastination factors related to a selected population of adolescent students.

1. The hours of presence in the school and school environment

   Hours in school

   The most important factor from the perspective of students is long hours spent in school, about 9 hours per day. Due to the length of time students spend in school, paying attention to contextual factors such as school space is academic procrastination.

   “I really did listen to the lessons, but we now just ask when the bell is going to ring to get rid of these boring lessons, and when we come home, we want to play…. Now we have not enough time to play and I cannot get good marks in this situation, because I do not learn anything in the classes. I just feel tired. I think it is useless and it is so long” (code 14).

   School environment

   According to Monadi (2014), questions are also raised about whether the shape of the building and school classrooms, the school yard, or local facilities including gym, assembly, library, chapel, sanitary services, etc., can influence students’ motivation to perform better academically. When the school environment is discussed, we mean two parts, including both the physical and cultural structures. The physical part consists of several places and concerns the overall form of the school building and whether it is built for educational purpose only or if the building has a proper yard for sports and games (Monadi, 2014).

   The school building where the interviews were conducted was a residential-villa building not built for educational purposes, and the yard was highly limited and small. In addition, the condition of the classrooms in terms of adequate exposure, lack of noise, suitable tables and chairs, and a ventilation system proper to each season are very important factors (Monadi, 2014).

   In the school used for this study, some classrooms had been added later, and were in poor condition. Undoubtedly, the proper physical structure of the classrooms is increasingly significant (Monadi, 2014).
Unfortunately, in Iran, due to the lack of attention to the physical structure of schools and the increasing expansion of private schools at all educational levels, proper residential schools are not used, and this issue should be further considered by the authorities practicing in the Ministry of Education.

More important than the physical nature of the school building is the cultural environment in the school (Monadi, 2014). Cultural environment encompasses the spirit and atmosphere dominating physical places; Bourdieu calls it “field.” According to Bourdieu (2009), “field is a structured social space or a field of forces within which we deal with the domineering and submissive persons with continuous and stable relationships and inequalities. This field is a battle field to change or maintain the fighting field.”.

In this state, a variety of elements can be considered that have a cultural aspect and spirit. The color of classrooms, halls, courtyard, tabloids, paintings, and the pictures on the walls should be taken into account because these elements significantly impact student’s thinking and beliefs.

As can be inferred from students’ statements, paying attention to contextual factors along with other factors (psycho-emotional, cognitive-behavioral) is an important educational element that has been missing in Iran, and its vacuum is strongly felt. Perhaps, if the school environment paid more attention to its cultural and physical body, reluctance, fatigue, reduced motivation, and academic procrastination in students would not be seen.

2. The role of parents

The second factor that students emphasized during the interview and referred to repeatedly was the role of the father as an example and the mother as a help and guide. In the students with high procrastination, the exemplary role played by father and mother was highly insignificant.

parenting style

The role of the parent in the form of parenting style has been examined. Each family adopts specific practices in personal and social education of their children. Parenting styles are affected by social, political, and economic factors (Hardey et al. 1993). To explain interviewees’ statements, Adler’s parenting style was used.

“My father returns home late at night and is tired, yet my mother does not address my lesson because she has to pay attention to my brother. When my father returns home, he asks me some questions, and opens the books and asks a question randomly, but as he is tired, he cannot ask so many questions” (Code 3).

Here we can observe a negligent parenting style (parents are often busy, there is no limit, and parents are not able to establish an intimate relation with the child), and also an easy-going style (parents supply the child with many gifts, benefits and advantages, yet they do not fulfill the child's basic needs). The child in such an environment is dull and apathetic and loses his innovation and self-motivation. It is noteworthy that the two students' whose responses are cited here (code 3, code 7, code 13 and code 15), report the highest level of procrastination.
For example, my parents want me to explain to them what I have learned from my lessons, and they ask me many questions on the lessons… Mainly my father asks me questions, and tells me that [I should] learn my lessons to attain good marks and if I learn the lesson perfectly and am able to dominate all the parts of the lesson, I will not be anxious at the time of exam and can attain good marks (Code 4).

Here we can observe free-style and inspiring style parenting. The parents accept the child’s uniqueness, provide him with a deep sense of respect and equality, and encourage the child to correct errors, expand his capabilities, and understand the importance of cooperation. The perfectionist style is also shown here, in which the parents have very high standards and accept the child only when his performance is in accordance with their standards. Although the child tries as much as he can, the norms are not met, resulting in feelings of worthlessness. Perfectionist parents can strengthen and stabilize such tendencies in their children. One consequence of negative perfectionist tendencies is the emergence of procrastination that is very damaging. However, regarding the student in this study whose parents seem to represent the perfectionist style (Code 2 and Code 12), perfectionism is of a self-centered and positive type.

Use of positive and negative reinforcement by parents

There are two types of reinforcement events. Positive reinforcement includes stimulators that add something to the situation. These could be primary stimulators, like food or water, or secondary stimulators that are important to each person, such as money, laudatory statements, etc. Negative reinforcement includes removal of something from the situation, such as sunlight, or addition of something, like excessive noise. A secondary type of negative reinforcement might include threatening the student for getting low scores). In both cases, the reinforcement has an equal effect – it increases the likelihood of response (Hergenhahn, Olson, 1976).

Each time that I can achieve a mark of A, my mother allows me to play X Box or use my mobile 20 to 30 minutes further (Code 1).

This parent has used Primack reinforcement, which proved to be effective for the student (Code 1) because she elicited the minimum rate of procrastination. Premack (1959) in his research showed that behaviors with high frequency can be associated with behaviors with low or weak frequency; thus it would be possible to strengthen weak behavior. For example, we can tell a child who spends too much time watching TV that he is allowed to watch TV only if he first does his homework.

Another point is that most of the time parents use this policy of reinforcement and punishment. For example, if you do not perform your assignments properly, it’s ok, but if your marks are low, you will not be allowed to watch TV or use your ipad (Code 2).

In negative reinforcement, removal of the negative consequence or escape from it leads to strengthening of behavior. Negative reinforcement, like positive reinforcement, is an ordinary
phenomenon of daily life. In the case of Code 2, the use of negative reinforcement has been effective.

Yeah, my father once seized my phone, and then gave it back to me. When I like the subject matter of a lesson, I study it well, and I receive good marks, but I do not like mathematics lessons. I do not study, and there is nobody at home who help me to learn it better so my marks will be bad (Code 13).

Different reinforcments for different people have various effects. The effect of a reinforcement on a given individual is different in different circumstances. Therefore, the above point should be taken into account when using reinforcments under different conditions and with different people. For example, in this case (Code 13), individual interest and motivation to learn a lesson are very important. The teacher in the classroom and parents in the home can convert a lesson that seems boring to the learner into a fascinating topic (with an emphasis on applied aspects), and they can play effective roles in enhancing the motivation of students by using a series of reinforcments.

3. The sense of competition and peer influence
Human behavior and personal interaction with others may take place in three states, including cooperation, competition and individualism. In cooperation, people unanimously aim to achieve their objectives together. In such circumstances, it is better for a person to facilitate the development of other members of the group. In individualist situations, an individual’s achievement of his goal is independent from the others. However in competitive situations, people seek to achieve their goals independent from each other; when a person reaches his goal, other people who are in competition with him are deprived of reaching their goals. In such circumstances, a person tries to have a higher performance than others. Many empirical studies show that collaborative experiences, more than competitiveness or individualistic experiences, can promote beneficial and supportive relationships, as well as social and cognitive development, thus preventing the occurrence of procrastination (Johnson, 1981, as cited in James and Johnson, 1983).

Sometimes I compete with my classmates, and I like to get better scores than them and show them that I am better than them. I need a force, a motivation, something that makes me mad to do my best and to show other classmates who I am, and what brilliant talent I have. (Code 15).

Competition can be divided into two categories, including direct and indirect. Direct competition involves direct rivalry between two people, where each one seeks to maximize his success and minimize the success of the rival. In indirect competition, one strives to achieve optimal and excellent performance against an impersonal criterion, such as a best past performance or functional norms that show the balance of ability. An individual or group may make many attempts to achieve the desired objective. In this case, individual success depends on one’s power.
to approach the desired criterion, and the concept of defeat is modified to some extent. In this type of competition, if the main criterion is past performance, people with different abilities may also be able to compete, because the individual is with himself, and his effort will play a decisive role.

I am now competing with Arya. All of my classmates compete with me. It’s been fun, not because of the fact that…the teachers expect all of us…teachers usually expect all of us to have good marks. When a pupil’s mark is usually A, if she fails to obtain a good mark even once, the teacher … thinks that she has not achieved as well as she did in the past, and asks her: why? What has happened? And this is embarrassing. (Code 11)

Most of the research conducted on cooperation shows that cooperation-based situations, especially in education, can have positive effects. However, what has been proposed regarding competition encompasses opposing views. While criticizing some perspectives that have been expressed in confirming the benefits of competition, some researchers such as Kohn (1986) refer to negative consequences of competitiveness. Rejecting the inevitability of competition, Kohn explains that children, especially boys, learn through socialization to compete with others, and competitiveness can be reduced or removed via inhibition of situations that stimulate and intensify it. Regarding the pleasing sense of competition, Kohn states that, although competition may lead to the creation of a temporary thrill, its negative consequences in the future will be continued – that is, a loser’s sense of self-esteem diminishes, and the tendency to procrastinate increases. The winners may feel arrogance and egotism, but stress, feelings of insecurity, and anxiety may occur, thus leading to violence and fraud.

In collaboration-based educational environments, initial interest focuses on acquiring expertise in the subject of learning, which would be an end in itself, not a tool to display competence. In this case, competitiveness plays a significant role, and effort becomes more prominent than talent and superior ability. In such an environment, all people would be able to achieve success, because the determining factor in evaluation would be self-improvement, not doing better than others (Feschbach, 1991).

The body of research carried out in this area shows that the level of cooperation and competition in doing homework among students from different subcultures is substantially different (Madsen, 1971, 1975; Thomas, 1975; Marin, 1975; Alvarez, 1979). The results show that in almost all cases, students in rural cultures are more cooperative and interactive than students in urban areas. Students in urban spaces are more competitive than rural students. In addition, age increases, the competitiveness of students in almost all of the cultures under study gradually increases. Thus, we cannot ignore the fact that social environment plays a role in the formation of behaviors built on cooperation and competition, as well as an individual’s tendency to show procrastination.

I want to go to school and buy some stuff, and when I reach school I talk to my friends – for example, we talk about online games – and then we attend class. When I get home
cannot study my lessons anymore… when I did my game, me and my friends go to pool, and I go to football club at odd days, and when I return home, it is too late (Code 6).

Since middle class students are in one of the most critical stages of their lives, the benefits they derive from social skills will undoubtedly have an important role in providing them with a healthy lifestyle and an awareness of the dynamism of society. On the other hand, students’ emotional-behavioral involvement in academic affairs affects their learning, academic achievement, and social and cognitive development. Thus, an evaluation of the factors affecting social skills and behavioral and emotional cooperation is essential (Grizzle, 2004).

4.-Fear of failure (perfectionism)
The fourth factor noted by nine students is the fear of failure and resulting perfectionist tendencies. Anxiety is a constant companion of training. The main sources of test anxiety are fear of failure and loss of self-esteem (Hill & Wiggfield, 1984, as cited in Slavin, 2009). The fear of failure is one of the consequences of academic procrastination (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984; Schoenberg and Lai, 1995). Previous research indicates that test anxiety is a good predictor for academic procrastination (Chari & Dehqani, 2009).

Before the beginning of academic exams, I started to study, and I also studied throughout the year… if the school did not give exams, I did not study, but after a while my parents asked why the school wasn’t giving exams. They said, “I wish I did not buy lap top for you, then you would study better.” And if I said I had done all my daily assignments, they said, “Ok, then study for the final exam,” and this is a kind of prevention… prevention of failure (Code 4).

According to the research performed by Ellis (1977), perfectionist procrastinators keep themselves prepared, yet they avoid fulfilling tasks. The research has shown that these people have over-conscious thinking, and tend to be afraid of success or failure, and the ultimate result would be neurotic avoidance. In addition, Norman (1980) refers to four cognitive dimensions that lead students to avoid doing homework. They:

a) over-estimate the remaining time, or they underestimate real time.
b) pay too much attention to probable future motivational emotions.
c) wrongly assess the need for congruence between emotions and success in work.
d) believe that when they are tired, they are not required to work, so they perform marginal tasks.

However, regarding the students in our study (Code 1, 2, 10 & 12), perfectionism and fear of failure have positive effects on them, and they exhibit a lower level of academic procrastination. “Sometimes I am so nervous. Some lessons can be memorized. Such as Arabic language, while some others, such as experimental sciences and mathematics, that have several topics are very difficult for me to understand. So I have so much stress when dealing with them and I am anxious about the final result” (Code 10).
5. Preference for immediate over delayed reinforcement

The fifth factor affecting the development of educational procrastination is reported with the lowest frequency (n = 6), but it is not insignificant. To explain it, we applied some cognitive behavioral and psychoanalytic theories. Herrnstein’s concurrent reinforcement schedule and matching law (1961) regulates the relationship between reinforcement and performance. In addition, because, relative behavior frequency can be matched with reinforcement frequency, Herrnstein’s theory clarifies previous observations of behaviorists. In applying Herrnstein’s law to the expression of the consequences of procrastination, the amount, quality, and the length of reinforcements and punishments is used (Davidson & McCarthy, 1988, cited in Olson and Hargenhan, 1976).

“To tell the truth, I become lazy without any reason. I cannot explain the reason. Sometimes we like to do something and sometimes we do not like to do it. If we know that we should do something because it is necessary, we do it anyway. But when the exam date is next week, we say ok, we have much time, and we can start to study the lesson a few days from now. Now we just want to have fun and play. We delay it until the last day and make many excuses for ourselves, and possibly we do not even attempt to study for that exam, and this can cause stress and pressure. Only under pressure and lack of time, we seek to do the work promptly. I don’t know what the reason is. Sometimes somebody wants us to buy him a flower pot, and we go and wander in the streets, and just waste time and postpone buying the flower vase. Time goes on and we still fail to buy the item. We eat a sandwich, see many shops, and many other things, and after some hours, we buy the vase, and the person asks us why we have delayed so much. We say I just searched for the best vase, and it took much time”. (Code 4).

While the reinforcement program is simultaneously used for a review of selective behaviors, a concurrent chain reinforcement schedule is applied for analyzing complex selective behaviors. According to Olson and Hargenhan (1976), one of the uses of this program is related to personal control. Under normal conditions, people prefer small but immediate reinforcements over large yet deferred reinforcements. But the question is what can change this preference? It seems that time and amount of personal control are essential factors. Reinforcements lose their reinforcing effect over time.

Thus, teachers and parents can utilize reinforcement at the right time using proper plans. More importantly, they can help students work on personal control (cognitive area), which can be effective not only in the educational area but also different social areas. By achieving a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, students can strengthen their self-efficacy and self-esteem. The paper authored by Lee Davis (translated by Saeidi, 2007) entitled “Basic skills training of personal control” can be a good guide for teachers and parents.

On the other hand, according to Freud’s theory (1923, cited in Monadi, 2013), the id can shape the ecological basis of all human foundations. The id operates based on the pleasure principle,
i.e., the search for joy and distance from suffering. Accordingly, the id is looking for full and immediate gratification and acts as a spoiled child. The id can tolerate frustration, and is free of prohibitions. However, the superego, which is opposite to the id, represents the moral part of human action, and includes both ideals that we seek to achieve and punishments imposed due to an infringement of what is moral. This structure acts to control behavior based on social rules, i.e., provision of reward (honor and self-gratification) for good behaviors, and imposition of punishment (guilt, humiliation and misery) for bad behaviors. Self is the third structure considered in this theory. While the id seeks to achieve pleasure and the superego is perfectionist, the self is realistic. The self seeks to express and to gratify the id’s desires based on reality and the superego’s desires (Monadi, 2013).

Therefore, addressing the real self can guide and help an individual in the formation of proper preferences, progress in this way, and right guidance and selections. In addition, as the result of proper selections, academic procrastination can be prevented.

Discussion and Conclusion
The current study mainly aimed to examine the causes of procrastination among middle school students. By conducting qualitative research and content analysis of students’ statements, the factors contributing to procrastination were identified. In the current research, without considering a specific theoretical perspective on procrastination, we adopted a multi-dimensional view (psychological-emotional, behavioral-cognitive-contextual) on the causes of academic procrastination. After content analysis, we identified five main categories, which, based on their priority from the perspective of the students (students’ statements), can be categorized as follows. The hours of presence in the school and school environment:

Each of the Fifteen study participants repeatedly referred to excessive tiredness and fatigue due to long hours spent in school. Unfortunately, in Iran, due to the lack of attention to the physical body of schools and increasing expansion of private schools at all educational levels, proper residential schools are not used, and these issues should be further considered by the authorities practicing in the Ministry of Education (Monadi, 2014). These actions, while taking proper cultural programs into account (such as academic visitations) for enhancing cultural assets, can increasingly motivate students, especially during adolescent (middle school) years. Such an increase in motivation level would enhance, education quality and diminish students' tendencies to procrastinate in doing academic assignments. Little research has been conducted on the effective contextual factors and ways to enhance students’ motivation. Perhaps, if the education system would pay more attention to both cultural and physical structures, reluctance, fatigue, reduced motivation and academic procrastination in students would not be seen.

The role of parents and use of positive and negative reinforcements:
All Fifteen students interviewed indirectly emphasized the degree of attention and the presence of parents in their pursuit of academic progress and achievement. Each family adopts specific practices in the personal and social education of the children. These parenting styles are affected by social, political, economic, and other relevant factors (Hardey et al. 1993). In the current research, four of Adler's parenting styles were seen. Two other styles_ free-style, inspiring style and perfectionist style_ were identified. The parents of the students identified as (code 1, 2, 10 & 12) reflect these two styles. Notably, these four students had lowest rate of procrastination based on their teachers’ report. In addition, the perfectionism of the student code 2 and 12 is of a self-centered and positive type, and encompasses both a negligent style and an easy-going style. Parenting styles can significantly promote motivation, improve psycho-emotional dimensions (Freud’s emphasis on male offspring’s modeling of the father), and shape behavior by a variety of reinforcements to reduce procrastination. According to the students’ statements, parents’ use of different types of reinforcements was highly common for encouragement or punishment. Different reinforcements for different people have various effects. Furthermore, the effect of a reinforcement on a given individual is different in different circumstances. For example, in the case (of student code 3, 13 & 15), use of negative reinforcements (not allowing student to use mobile phone) was not effective. Thus, this point should be taken into account by parents and teachers under different circumstances and with different people.

The sense of competition and peer influence
Most of the research carried out in the area of cooperation shows that cooperation-based situations, especially in education, can bring about more positive effects. However, the effect of competition encompasses opposing views. While criticizing some perspectives that have been expressed in confirming the benefits of competition, some researchers such as Kohn (1986) refer to the negative consequences of competitiveness. Rejecting the inevitability of competition, Kohn explains that children, especially boys, learn through socialization to compete with others, but competitiveness can be reduced or removed via inhibition of situations that stimulate and intensify it. Regarding the pleasing sense of competition, Kohn states that, although competition may lead to the creation of a temporary thrill, its negative consequences in the future will be continued, i.e., the sense of self-esteem in losers diminishes, and the tendency to procrastination increases. Winners may feel arrogance, egotism, or stress, and feelings of insecurity and anxiety may occur, thus violence and fraud become dominant. In collaboration-based educational environments, initial interest focuses on acquiring competence and then learning, learning would be an end in itself, not a tool to display competence. In this case, competitiveness plays a significant role, and effort becomes more prominent than talent and superior ability. In such an environment, all people can achieve success, because evaluation as a determining factor would be self-improvement, not doing better than others (Feschbach, 1991).
The body of research carried out in this area shows that the level of cooperation and competition among students from different subcultures in doing homework is substantially different (Madsen, 1971, 1975; Thomas, 1975; Marin, 1975; Alvarez, 1979). The results show that, as age increases, the competitiveness of students in almost all of the cultures under study gradually increases. Thus, we cannot ignore the fact that social environment plays a role in the formation of cooperative and competitive behaviors, as well as an individual’s tendency to show procrastination. The impact of peers in mutual relationships can vary based on the different social skills they obtain. However, it should be noted that the interactions should be accompanied by acquisition of social skills so as to better guide the interactions in a proper direction.

4. Fear of failure (perfectionism):
The fourth factor noted by nine students is the fear of failure and perfectionist tendencies. Anxiety is a constant companion of training. The main source of test anxiety is fear of failure and also loss of self-esteem (Hill & Wiggfield, 1984, as cited in Slavin, 2009). Fear of failure is one of the consequences of academic procrastination (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984; Schoenberg and Lai, 1995). Previous research indicates that test anxiety is a good predictor for academic procrastination (Chari & Dehqani, 2009).

Induced social perfectionism refers to an individual’s exaggerated and unrealistic expectations of other people (including parents and teachers). As these extreme measures are imposed on the individual by others, and the individual fails to control them, they usually lead to the fear of failure, anxiety and distress with doing homework, and the final result would be procrastination (Halloy, 2009). These people constantly worry about what others think of them, and use procrastination to protect themselves from real failure. On the other hand, people with self-autonomous perfectionism make much attempt to achieve their irrational objectives (Fellet et al, 1992). Thus, they rarely tend to procrastination, and either do their best to achieve a goal or completely forsake it. According to the research conducted by Sepehrain (2012), Burk & Yuen (2008), Van Eerde (2003), and Essau et al. (2004), anxiety more than other variables can predict male students’ procrastination. Therefore, holding classes and workshops on how to control academic anxiety can contribute to reduced academic procrastination.

Preferences of immediate factors over delayed ones:
The fifth factor affecting the development of educational procrastination relates to immediate vs. delayed reinforcement. Although this factor is reported with the lowest frequency (n = 3), it is not insignificant. To explain it, we used some cognitive behavioral and psychoanalytic theories. Hernstein’s concurrent reinforcement schedule and matching law (1961) regulates the relationship between reinforcement and performance. In addition, saying that, under the same programs, the relative behavior frequency can be matched with the reinforcement frequency, Hernstein’s theory clarified previous observations of behaviorists.
Thus, teachers and parents can utilize reinforcement at the right time, using proper plans. More importantly, helping students work on personal control (cognitive area) can be effective not only in the educational area but also in different social areas. By achieving a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, students can strengthen their self-efficacy and self-esteem. The paper authored by Lee Davis (translated by Saeidi, 2007) entitled “Basic skills training of personal control” can be a good guide for teachers and parents. Addressing the real self can guide and help individuals form proper preferences and make the right selections. In addition, as the result of proper selections, academic procrastination can be prevented.

Besides the mentioned cases, transition to a new educational level may be accompanied by a variety of consequences. For many, this transition represents the beginning of a broadly general decline in academic performance, motivation, and perceptions of abilities and relationships with peers and teachers. The teen’s future is subject to vulnerability, unless the educational system makes reforms needed to help promote motivation, psycho-emotional, behavioral and underlying factors in students to achieve academically and reduce procrastinating behaviors (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Echols, Midgley, & Adler, 1984).

Because the exercise of academic procrastination and its high frequency is a serious threat to academic achievement at all educational levels, having a comprehensive, wide-open view to understanding and solving this problem is necessary. Developing efficient and useful solutions can play an important role in reducing academic procrastination.

In the end, it is important to note that these analyses and the relevant results are specific to Fifteen middle school male students. Some of the limitations of this study include lack of generalizability of the results and their dependency on the circumstances (especially location). On the other hand, such limitations can be a strength or at least a characteristic from another perspective, by considering the behavioral, environmental, cultural, psycho-emotional and cognitive variables. Given that conducting the research with a focus on gender differences in the field of education studies has always been the focus of researchers’ practices, it is recommended that researchers analyze the causes of academic procrastination in both sexes.
References


Ahmadi, Zeinab. (2012). The role of goal orientation and motivational beliefs in academic procrastination of third year high school students in Tabriz. Graduate degree dissertation in educational research. Faculty of education and Psychology, Department of Educational Sciences, Tabriz.


Cone Hensley, Lauren. (2013). the Fine Points of Working under Pressure: Active and Passive Procrastination among College Students. Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University.


Karimi, A. A., (2011). The relationship between family functioning and identity styles and religious orientation in male and female high school students; Jolfa county; Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Tehran, Master thesis.

Monadi, M., (2014); Sociology of Education; Avaye Noor Publications; Tehran.


