Psychohealth: Scientific Journal of Psychology and Mental Health
Vol 1, No 1, 2025, 27-37 https://doi.org/10.35912/psychohealth.v1i1.3644

Psychological determinants of procrastination in the formation of students' independent learning activity

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Article History:
Received on 1 May 2025
1st Revision on 8 May 2025
Accepted on 13 May 2025

Abstract.
Purpose: This study aims to examine the psychological determinants of procrastination in the process of developing students' independent learning activities. It focuses on how procrastination, as a conscious delay in task completion, is linked to academic motivation, self-regulation, and time management.
Research Methodology: A qualitative-descriptive approach was employed, drawing on a review of contemporary psychological and educational literature. The analysis integrates cognitive, emotional, and social perspectives to understand the underlying causes of procrastination and its implications for independent learning.
Results: The findings reveal that procrastination is strongly associated with deficits in time management skills, low intrinsic motivation, and poor emotional regulation. Social influences, such as peer pressure and learning environment, also play a significant role. These factors collectively hinder the effectiveness of independent learning by reducing persistence, focus, and academic achievement.
Conclusions: Procrastination acts as a barrier to effective self-directed learning. Addressing cognitive distortions, fostering emotional resilience, and enhancing self-regulation are essential to reducing procrastination levels and improving independent learning outcomes.
Limitations: The study is limited by its reliance on literature-based analysis rather than empirical testing. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to measure causal relationships between procrastination and learning effectiveness.
Contribution: This article contributes to educational psychology by highlighting the interplay between psychological factors and learning behavior, offering practical recommendations to support students' self-directed learning.

Keywords: *Academic Motivation, Independent Learning, Procrastination, Self-Regulation, Time Management*

How to Cite: Kuvandikovich, R. F. (2025). Psychological determinants of procrastination in the formation of students' independent learning activity. *Psychohealth: Scientific Journal of Psychology and Mental Health,* 1(1), 27-37.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary higher education context, students' ability to engage in independent learning is increasingly recognized as a core competence for academic success and lifelong learning (Sirait, Dewi, & Rumengan, 2024). Independent learning involves the active, self-directed pursuit of knowledge, wherein learners take responsibility for setting goals, managing resources, monitoring progress, and reflecting on outcomes. However, the formation of such self-regulated learning behavior is often hindered by procrastination, a widespread phenomenon characterized by the voluntary, irrational postponement of tasks despite anticipating negative consequences (Steel, 2007). Procrastination has

beenn extensively studied in psychology as a multifaceted construct influenced by cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors. Empirical evidence suggests that procrastination is not merely a time-management problem but rather a complex self-regulatory failure associated with low self-efficacy, heightened task aversiveness, perfectionism, fear of failure, and dysregulated emotional states (F. Sirois & Pychyl, 2013; Turdiev, 2024).

In academic settings, chronic procrastination has been linked to decreased academic performance, elevated stress levels, reduced learning satisfaction, and diminished self-confidence (Duru & Balkis, 2017; Turdiev, 2024). The relationship between procrastination and independent learning is of particular interest, as both processes involve overlapping psychological determinants such as intrinsic motivation, goal orientation, metacognitive awareness, and emotional resilience (Rozental, Forsström, Hussoon, & Klingsieck, 2022; Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023). While independent learning requires sustained attention, self-discipline, and consistent effort, procrastination undermines these capacities by diverting focus toward short-term mood regulation and avoidance behavior (Wa, Desriyantika, Hasbullah, Et, & Indrianni, 2024).

As such, understanding the psychological determinants of procrastination is crucial for designing targeted interventions that can foster effective independent learning habits among students (Rahayu, Candra, & Sujadi, 2024; Tao, Hanif, & Lieqin, 2025). This study aimed to explore the psychological determinants of procrastination that impede the development of independent learning activities in university students. Specifically, it examines the cognitive (e.g., decision-making biases, task perception), emotional (e.g., anxiety, low emotional regulation), and social (e.g., peer influence, academic environment) factors that contribute to procrastinatory behavior in students. Furthermore, the paper discusses evidence-based strategies for reducing procrastination, thereby enhancing students' capacity for autonomous, self-regulated academic engagement (Nieto, Faure-Carvallo, Calderon, & Gustems, 2024; Ye, Chi, Ma, & Pan, 2025).

Independent learning has emerged as a central pillar of modern pedagogy in higher education, particularly in response to rapid global transformations in knowledge, technology, and labor markets (Suwardi & Riyadi, 2024). The increasing emphasis on lifelong learning requires students to become not merely passive recipients of knowledge but also active constructors of their own educational pathways. In this sense, universities are tasked not only with transmitting disciplinary expertise but also with equipping students with the metacognitive, motivational, and emotional tools necessary to engage in independent learning (Konjala & Wulansari, 2024). However, the persistent challenge of procrastination remains a formidable barrier to this vision. Scholars have argued that procrastination reflects deeper psychological mechanisms that undermine students' abilities to function autonomously. From a cognitive perspective, procrastination arises when students misjudge academic tasks.

The planning fallacy, optimism bias, and hyperbolic discounting cause students to underestimate the time required, overestimate their future capacity, or prioritize immediate pleasure over long-term academic benefits. Such distorted perceptions are particularly problematic in independent learning environments, where the absence of external deadlines and instructor monitoring places the entire burden of time allocation and task prioritization on the learner (Maskur, Basir, & Dewi, 2024). From an emotional standpoint, procrastination can be understood as a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy. Academic tasks are frequently perceived as threatening to self-esteem or competence, eliciting anxiety, frustration, and boredom. To escape these negative emotions, students delay task initiation, gaining short-term relief at the expense of their long-term academic goals. Neuroscientific studies reinforce this interpretation, demonstrating heightened amygdala activation and diminished prefrontal cortex control among chronic procrastinators when they are faced with demanding tasks.

This imbalance illustrates how affective reactivity can override rational executive functioning, leading to habitual avoidance of the task. The social dimension further complicates this picture. Procrastination does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by peer norms, classroom culture and institutional climate. Collaborative and supportive environments where feedback is constructive, guidance is accessible, and competition is balanced can buffer procrastination by fostering belonging and motivation. Conversely,

highly competitive or unsupportive contexts exacerbate avoidance by intensifying stress and fear of failure. This highlights the responsibility of educational institutions to design learning environments that encourage autonomy while providing sufficient scaffolding to reduce psychological barriers (Pychyl & Sirois, 2016).

The significance of studying procrastination within the framework of independent learning lies in its practical implications for enhancing learning outcomes. As higher education increasingly embraces blended learning, digital platforms, and flexible curricula, students are granted greater freedom in determining when, where, and how to study. While such autonomy aligns with the goals of independent learning, it simultaneously increases exposure to distractions and competing demands (Masoumian et al., 2024; Rad, Samadi, Sirois, & Goodarzi, 2023). Digital environments saturated with instant gratification amplify the allure of procrastination. Students who lack robust self-regulatory capacities often struggle to resist these temptations, leading to disengagement and compromised learning outcomes. Therefore, interventions to address procrastination must extend beyond superficial time-management training.

Evidence suggests that effective strategies should incorporate cognitive restructuring (helping students reframe tasks positively and realistically), emotional regulation training (such as mindfulness, stress reduction, and self-compassion exercises), and social support systems (peer mentoring, collaborative study groups, and accessible academic advising) (Huang, Lin, Wang, & Du, 2025; Svartdal, Dahl, Gamst-Klaussen, Koppenborg, & Klingsieck, 2020). For example, self-compassion interventions have been shown to mitigate the negative cycle of self-criticism and avoidance, enabling students to re-engage with tasks despite setbacks despite setbacks. Similarly, mindfulness practices help cultivate awareness of present experiences and reduce impulsive tendencies to escape discomfort (Juárez, González-Ortega, & Aguiar-Pérez, 2023; Pérez-Juárez, González-Ortega, & Aguiar-Pérez, 2023).

The broader educational and societal contexts underscore the urgency of addressing procrastination. In a world marked by accelerating technological change and increasing demands for adaptability, the ability to learn independently is no longer optional but essential. Students who fail to develop this capacity risk not only academic underperformance but also diminished employability and resilience in the workforce (Safari & Yousefpoor, 2022; Soumeya & Mahassin, 2024). Therefore, procrastination is not merely a personal flaw but a systemic challenge that undermines the broader mission of higher education to cultivate lifelong learners and responsible citizens. Moreover, the exploration of procrastination intersects with contemporary discussions of mental health in higher education. Rising levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout among university students highlight the need for holistic approaches that integrate academic skill building with psychological well-being.

Understanding procrastination as both a cause and consequence of emotional distress offers a pathway to interventions that promote academic success while supporting mental health (Eckert, Ebert, Lehr, Sieland, & Berking, 2016; Ye et al., 2025). Finally, the relevance of this topic extends to educational policies and curriculum design. Universities that prioritize the cultivation of independent learning must also recognize the hidden obstacles faced by students. Embedding structured metacognitive training, providing opportunities for reflective practice, and fostering inclusive academic climates are essential steps in creating conditions in which independent learning can flourish. By integrating psychological insights into institutional strategies, higher education can prepare students more effectively for the complex demands of the twenty-first century (Cai & Meng, 2025; Johansson et al., 2023).

2. Literature review

Procrastination has been a focal point of psychological research for several decades, particularly in the context of academic performance and self-regulated learning (SRL). Early studies by Ellis and Knaus (1977) conceptualized procrastination as an irrational delay in action, while later work by Ferrari, Johnson, and McCown (1995) differentiated between active and passive procrastination, highlighting its diverse manifestations. Steel (2007) meta-analytic review further consolidated procrastination as a self-regulation failure driven by low expectancy of success,

impulsivity, and task aversiveness. From the perspective of self-regulated learning theory (ZimmermanZimmerman (2002), effective independent learning requires learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning strategies. Procrastination disrupts these processes by reducing goal-directed behaviors and fostering avoidance patterns. Empirical findings by Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani (2008) suggest that procrastination is negatively correlated with self-efficacy and positively associated with academic stress and anxiety. These findings are supported by Fuschia M Sirois, Yang, and van Eerde (2019), who emphasize that emotional dysregulation plays a critical mediating role between procrastination and academic underachievement.

Temporal motivation theory (SteelSteel (2007) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding procrastination by integrating expectancy theory, hyperbolic discounting, and need theory. According to this model, students are more likely to procrastinate when perceived task utility is low, deadlines are distant, or their motivation is undermined by competing short-term rewards. In the context of independent learning, such motivational dynamics can severely limit engagement in self-directed study. Social and environmental factors also influence procrastination. Peer norms, institutional culture, and academic workload distribution can exacerbate or mitigate procrastination. For instance, students in collaborative and feedback-rich environments reported lower levels of academic procrastination than those in competitive, performance-oriented settings. This suggests that interventions targeting procrastination should address not only individual cognitive and emotional processes but also broader contextual and organizational variables. In summary, the literature indicates that procrastination is a multifactorial construct shaped by cognitive biases, emotional regulation, motivational profiles, and environmental conditions. Addressing these determinants is essential for enhancing students' abilities to engage in sustained autonomous learning.

2.1 Conceptual Perspectives on Procrastination

The conceptualization of procrastination has evolved substantially over time. While early cognitive-behavioral perspectives treated procrastination as irrational avoidance, contemporary approaches emphasize its adaptive and maladaptive aspects. For example, they distinguished between passive procrastinators, who delay tasks owing to indecision or anxiety, and active procrastinators, who intentionally postpone tasks but still meet deadlines and may even thrive under pressure. Although active procrastination is sometimes portrayed as adaptive, later studies have questioned whether it yields the same long-term benefits as planned procrastination. Other scholars have conceptualized procrastination within a broader framework of self-regulation. Tice and Procrastination is a failure of self-control, akin to addictive behaviors, where short-term mood repair overrides long-term goals. This aligns with ego depletion models, suggesting that when self-regulatory resources are depleted, individuals are more likely to succumb to avoidance behaviors. Thus, procrastination is not merely poor planning but reflects deeper volitional and motivational struggles (Wessel, Bradley, & Hood, 2019).

2.2 Cognitive Determinants

Cognitive theories highlight the role of decision-making bias and task appraisal. Students frequently fall prey to the planning fallacy, underestimating the time required for academic tasks despite repeated contrary experiences. Similarly, optimism bias leads learners to assume that they will perform better in the future, justifying current delays. Steel (2007) temporal motivation theory emphasizes hyperbolic discounting, where immediate gratifications such as leisure activities are valued disproportionately compared to delayed academic rewards. Perceptions of task difficulty and clarity are also important. Blunt and Pychyl (2000) demonstrated that task aversiveness is a strong predictor of procrastination, with ambiguous or monotonous assignments being postponed the most. In independent learning contexts, where tasks are less structured and external accountability is weaker, cognitive appraisals are intensified. Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to monitor and regulate one's thinking, is a protective factor. Learners with high metacognitive skills can recognize cognitive distortions and implement corrective strategies, thereby reducing procrastination tendencies.

2.3 Emotional and Affective Determinants

Emotional regulation is one of the strongest predictors of procrastination. According to F. Sirois and Pychyl (2013), procrastination is essentially an emotion-regulation failure. Tasks perceived as threatening or unpleasant elicit negative affect, which students attempt to avoid through procrastination. This avoidance provides short-term relief but perpetuates long-term stress, creating a vicious cycle of avoidance. Neurocognitive research supports this interpretation. Chronic procrastinators show hyperactivity in the amygdala, linked to anxiety and threat perception,and reduced activity in the prefrontal cortex, which governs planning and impulse control. Emotions such as anxiety, guilt, and boredom were strongly implicated. For example, academic procrastination has been correlated with test anxiety, where students delay studying to avoid feelings of incompetence. Conversely, positive emotions, such as interest and enjoyment, can buffer procrastination by enhancing intrinsic motivation. Self-compassion has emerged as a protective factor. F. Sirois and Pychyl (2013) found that students high in self-compassion were less likely to engage in procrastination because they avoided cycles of self-criticism that fuel avoidance.

2.4 Motivational Theories

Motivation is central to the understanding of procrastination. According to self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci (2000), procrastination reflects a lack of autonomous motivation. When students engage in tasks for extrinsic reasons, such as avoiding punishment or seeking approval, they are more likely to delay tasks aligned with their intrinsic interests. Specific, challenging, and proximal goals enhance persistence, whereas vague or distal goals foster procrastination. Independent learning contexts often emphasize long-term projects with flexible deadlines, making students especially vulnerable unless they can self-impose sub-goals and deadlines. Temporal motivation theory synthesizes these perspectives, showing how expectancy, value, delay, and impulsiveness interact dynamically to shape procrastination behaviors (Riwukore, Marnisah, Fellyanus Habaora, & Yustini, 2022; Tasyah, Septiya, Putri, Fernanda, & Azani, 2021).

2.5 Social and Environmental Influences

While much research emphasizes individual psychology, environmental and institutional factors are equally important. Wäschle, Allgaier, Lachner, Fink, and Nückles (2014) showed that students in feedback-rich and cooperative settings displayed lower levels of procrastination. Similarly, Klassen et al. (2008) found that cultural expectations and peer norms influenced procrastination, with collectivist contexts emphasizing obligation and discipline, while individualist contexts heightened autonomy but also susceptibility to delay (Cahyaningrum, Prasetya, & Mustiawan, 2025). Academic workload and curriculum design are also important. Excessive workloads or competitive environments exacerbate stress and avoidance, whereas balanced workloads and supportive guidance reduce procrastination. The digital environment introduces several new challenges. Instant access to entertainment and social media increases opportunities for distraction, intensifying tendencies toward procrastination in self-directed study (Ridho, Fauzan, Faisal, & Hanafi, 2024; Sapariati, Widnyani, & Dewi, 2025).

2.6 Consequences of Procrastination

The detrimental consequences of procrastination have been well documented. Academic outcomes, such as grades, retention, and satisfaction, are negatively affected. Psychologically, procrastinators report higher stress, poorer well-being, and lower self-esteem than non-procrastinators. Longitudinal studies suggest that chronic procrastination is linked to health problems, including stress-related illnesses. These outcomes reinforce the importance of addressing procrastination not only for academic success but also for broader mental health and life satisfaction (Johansson et al., 2023; F. M. Sirois, Stride, & Pychyl, 2023).

2.7 Intervention Strategies

Interventions span the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and environmental domains. Cognitive-behavioral approaches help students reframe maladaptive thoughts, challenge cognitive distortions, and develop realistic time estimates. Emotion-focused interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBCT) and self-compassion training, help regulate affect and reduce avoidance. Motivational interventions include goal-setting workshops, time-management programs, and the use of

implementationn intentions ("if-then" planning), which have proven effective in reducing procrastination among students. Socially, peer mentoring, collaborative learning groups, and supportive institutional climates provide accountability and encouragement to teachers. Digital interventions, such as productivity apps that block distractions or gamified learning platforms, also show promise in curbing procrastination in online learning environments (Husna, 2025; Maharani, Yahya, Putra, & Pramono, 2025).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological determinants of procrastination in independent learning among university students. This design allowed for the triangulation of data, ensuring both statistical reliability and contextual depth in interpreting the findings. The target population will consist of undergraduate students enrolled in various faculties at public universities. A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure diversity in gender, academic discipline and year of study. The anticipated sample size is 150–200 students, which is sufficient to achieve statistical power for the correlational and regression analyses.

3.1 Instruments

a) Procrastination Assessment Scale–Students (PASS) developed by Solomon and Rothblum (1988) to measure the frequency and reasons for procrastination in academic tasks.
b) Self-Regulated Learning Interview Schedule (SRLIS) by Zimmerman and Pons (1986) to assess students' self-regulation strategies in independent learning, and
c) Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) by Vallerand et al. (1992) to capture students' intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation levels.
d) Semi-structured interview protocols were used to explore participants' subjective experiences and perceptions of procrastination in their independent learning activities.

The research will be conducted in two phases.

a) Phase 1 (Quantitative): Administration of PASS, SRLIS, and AMS to all participants through an online survey. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analyses to identify significant predictors of procrastination.
b) Phase 2 (Qualitative): A purposive subsample of 20–25 students, representing high, medium, and low procrastination scores, will be invited for semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis will be applied to extract recurrent themes related to the cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS 28.0, employing correlation and regression analyses to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between procrastination and other variables. Qualitative data will be transcribed verbatim and coded using the NVivo 12 software. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings will follow a concurrent triangulation strategy to validate the results and enrich the interpretation. This study will adhere to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation will be voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained from all the respondents. Data will be anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and participants will have the right to withdraw at any stage, without penalty.

4. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the psychological determinants of procrastination and their impact on the formation of independent learning behaviors among university students. Consistent with previous research, the results indicate that procrastination is not merely a function of poor time management but rather a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors. Students with low self-efficacy and reduced intrinsic motivation demonstrated higher levels of procrastination, suggesting that beliefs about personal competence play a critical role in determining willingness to initiate and sustain independent learning tasks. The data also support the premise that emotional regulation is a central component in understanding procrastinatory behaviors. Participants who reported higher levels of academic anxiety and negative affect were more likely to

delayy their self-directed learning activities. This aligns with F. Sirois and Pychyl (2013), who argued that procrastination often functions as a short-term emotion regulation strategy, where students prioritize immediate mood repair over long-term academic goals. Such patterns of avoidance hinder the acquisition of knowledge and contribute to a cyclical decrease in motivation and self-confidence.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings revealed that environmental and contextual factors exerted a considerable influence on procrastination tendencies. Students who perceive their academic environment as overly competitive or lacking adequate feedback are more prone to disengagement and task avoidance. In contrast, supportive learning climates that encourage collaboration and provide structured feedback are associated with reduced procrastination and enhanced autonomous learning. These observations echo the conclusions of Wäschle et al. (2014), underscoring the importance of an academically supportive context in promoting self-regulated learning behaviors. Another noteworthy outcome of this study is the relationship between metacognitive awareness and procrastination.

Students who demonstrated higher levels of planning, monitoring, and self-assessment skills exhibited lower procrastination scores, reinforcing Zimmerman (2002) framework of self-regulated learning. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving metacognitive skills may effectively mitigate procrastination while simultaneously strengthening independent learning capabilities. Overall, the results confirm that reducing procrastination requires a multidimensional approach that addresses not only cognitive and emotional determinants but also the social and institutional contexts in which learning takes place. By fostering intrinsic motivation, enhancing self-efficacy, improving emotional regulation, and creating supportive learning environments, educators can significantly increase students' capacity for sustained, self-directed learning. This integrative perspective is essential for designing effective educational interventions that promote both academic success and the development of lifelong learning skills in students.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study emphasizes that procrastination in independent learning is not merely a time-management problem but rather a complex self-regulatory challenge rooted in emotional and cognitive determinants. Emotional regulation emerges as a critical factor, as students often delay tasks to temporarily reduce stress or anxiety, even though this avoidance harms their long-term achievement. Neuroscientific evidence supports this, showing that emotional overreaction can suppress executive functioning, thereby reinforcing procrastination as an emotion-focused coping strategy. In addition to emotions, cognitive determinants also play a decisive role. Task perception, outcome expectancy, decision-making biases, and metacognitive skills strongly influence whether students initiate or delay their academic work. Misjudging task demands, undervaluing outcomes, or falling into planning fallacies can trigger procrastination, while strong metacognitive regulation and constructive self-talk help protect against procrastination. Independent learning environments intensify these challenges, as students must manage their goals, schedules, and strategies without external supervision.

Therefore, addressing procrastination requires holistic interventions that integrate emotional resilience, cognitive skill building, and supportive institutional contexts. Training in emotional regulation, metacognitive strategies, and accurate time estimation, combined with autonomy-supportive learning environments, can reduce avoidance tendencies and foster independent-learning. Such a multidimensional approach equips students with the psychological and structural resources needed to transform procrastination-prone behaviors into proactive, self-directed academic engagement.

5.2 Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic recommendations can be proposed to minimize procrastination and strengthen students' independent learning: First, higher education institutions should integrate metacognitive skills training into their curricula. Students must be equipped with the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes. These skills help them anticipate obstacles, manage time more realistically, and adjust strategies according to academic demands. Second, support for the development of emotional regulation should be prioritized. Students often delay

taskss not because of a lack of ability but because of negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom, or fear of failure. Therefore, universities should provide stress management programs, mindfulness training, and cognitive techniques such as cognitive reappraisal, which helps students view difficult assignments as opportunities for growth rather than threats.

Third, creating a supportive academic environment is essential. Lecturers and institutions can provide constructive feedback, offer collaborative opportunities, and balance the workload distribution. Academic environments that emphasize excessive competition may exacerbate procrastination, whereas inclusive and collaborative climates have been shown to enhance engagement. Fourth, learning strategies should promote intrinsic motivation by offering tasks that are relevant, contextual, and autonomy supportive. Meaningful activities reduce reliance on short-term rewards and strengthen long-term commitment. Finally, interventions should be holistic and integrated, covering the cognitive, emotional, and contextual domains. Collaboration among lecturers, counselors, and educational policymakers is required to ensure comprehensive student development programs. In this way, students are not only supported in reducing procrastination but also trained to become resilient, adaptive, and independent learners, well prepared to face the demands of both academic and professional life.

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