

## **Delaying Academic Tasks? Predictors of Academic Procrastination among Asian International Students in American Universities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Existing body of research indicates that both cognitive and non-cognitive factors contribute to college students' tendency of academic procrastination. However, little attention has been paid to the likelihood of academic procrastination among Asian international college students. Given the need for empirical research on why Asian international students engage in delaying academic tasks, the purpose of our study was to determine what key factors are associated with academic procrastination among Asian international students. Using the survey data collected from 226 Asian international students enrolled at four different U.S. universities, our study indicates that collective coping, avoidance coping, and language ability are the three strongest predictors of procrastination in Asian international students.*

**Keywords:** Asian international students, academic procrastination

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**D**efined as the voluntary delay of completing academic work within the expected timeframe or the “irrational tendency to delay of an academic task” (Senécal, Julian, & Guay, 2003, p. 135), academic procrastination can

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adversely impact academic performance through incomplete assignments and lower grades; it poses a significant threat to students' academic success and psychological well-being (e.g., Klassen, Krawchuk, & Rajani, 2008). Although the degree to which students procrastinate may depend on the types of task (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), research shows that the majority of students engage in academic procrastination at some point in their college lives. Many prior studies have focused primarily on American college students, explaining how psychological factors such as self-regulation, perfectionism, and self-esteem are associated with students' tendency to delay academic work (e.g., Cao, 2012; Özer, 2011; Ferrari & Pychyl, 2012). To date, little attention has been paid to the likelihood of academic procrastination among international college students who are unfamiliar with American education settings. Thus, this study examines academic procrastination tendencies among Asian international students, a population that represents nearly 70% of all international students enrolled in American higher education (Institute of International Education, 2013).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research indicates that both cognitive (e.g., English language proficiency, self-regulation, and academic efficacy) and non-cognitive factors (e.g., acculturative stress, cross-cultural coping skills) contribute to academic procrastination (Klassen et al., 2008; Poyrazli et al., 2001). Previous research has found that limited English proficiency may create additional stress and frustration for international students, especially when it restricts their ability to participate in social events and class discussions or to meet the demands of a specific academic program (Poyrazli et al., 2001). Moreover, research has shown a clear relationship between academic efficacy and the ability to self-regulate academic tasks with deadlines. Academic efficacy—an individual's understanding of his or her competence in completing a specific task—is one of the strongest predictors of performance in an educational setting (Klassen et al., 2008) and may account for academic procrastination after controlling for previous academic achievement, personality traits, gender, socioeconomic status, self-esteem, and intelligence (Zuffiano et al., 2013).

Existing research also indicate that non-cognitive factors may impact international students' academic adjustment (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yeh et al., 2003). For example, acculturative stress, resulting from efforts to adapt to the social customs and norms of a new culture (Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004), poses many psychological challenges for international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons of academic procrastination tendencies reveal significant differences between western/individualistic and eastern/collectivistic culture

(Kuo, Roysircar, & Newby-Clark, 2006). While the cultural transition process occurs for all international students, Asian international students are likely to experience higher levels of stress than are their European counterparts because of cultural differences, (e.g., Yang, 2011). Asian international students who have cultural beliefs and/or coping strategies conflicting with American cultural norms may experience additional difficulties in adapting to the new educational environment and, as a result, may have an increased likelihood of academic procrastination (Klassen et al., 2008).

The following research questions guided our study:

- (1) Does the tendency of academic procrastination differ by demographic backgrounds among Asian international students?
- (2) What factors contribute to the likelihood of academic procrastination among Asian international students?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a survey design to explore factors related to procrastination in Asian international students. Students responded to an online Asian International Student Academic Procrastination Questionnaire (AISAPQ) consisting of 69 items, including six components: demographic information, academic self-efficacy (subscale from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire: Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993), Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS: Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), English language ability, procrastination behavior, and Cross-Cultural Coping Scale (CCCS: Kuo et al., 2006). This last component, the CCCS, includes three styles of coping: avoidance coping, engagement coping and collective coping. Avoidance coping mechanisms stress avoidant behaviors and the tendency to remain absent from social interactions. Engagement coping strategies employ direct actions and positive thinking. Finally, collective coping occurs when students draw on social support and cultural values by interacting with co-ethnic peers and supportive ethnic communities (Kuo et al., 2006).

Data came from 226 Asian international students enrolled at four different U.S. universities (3 public institutions and 1 private across the country), who participated in the online survey. The majority of the sample were graduate students (65%) and 61% of the sample were female, the average age was 25.14 years, and the average length of stay in the U.S. was 2.7 years. Students from China, Korea, and India comprised 76.4% of the sample. The majority of participants were single (91%).

The dependent variable for this study is a dichotomous “yes/no” response to the question, “Have you ever delayed working on one of your class assignments longer than you should have while studying in the United

States?" Independent variables included demographic characteristics, measures of acculturation stress, the cross-cultural coping scale, academic efficacy, and perceived English ability. Missing values (18% of the total sample) were handled using multiple imputations (MI), a method preferred over other traditional approaches to working with missing values (Acock, 2005). Further, to ensure the fit of our logistic regression model against the outcome variable, the Hosmer–Lemeshow (H–L) goodness-of-fit test was applied where insignificant results ( $p > .05$ ) indicated that the model was well fit to the data.

To analyze the data, we first ran a cross-tabulation to see how academic procrastination differed by categorical background variables (e.g., gender, academic status). We then used a binary logistic regression to examine how our independent variables were related to academic procrastination. Logistic regression was selected as the appropriate analytical method because of the binary nature of the dependent variable. Background characteristics, including academic status, gender, length of stay, age, and marital status, along with the measures of cross-cultural coping, acculturative stress, language ability, and academic self-efficacy were all entered in the regression model.

## **RESULTS**

Of the total participants ( $N = 226$ ), 35% of students reported academic procrastination. Cross-tabulation indicates that 36% of female respondents reported that they delayed working on academic tasks, compared with 33% of male respondents. Of the graduate respondents, 35% reported that they delayed working on academic tasks, whereas 34% of the undergraduate respondents reported academic procrastination. A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict Asian international students' likelihood of procrastinating work on academic tasks while studying in the U.S. The results of this logistic regression are presented in Table 1.

Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate an increased probability of procrastinating academic tasks among Asian international students, while odds ratios lower than 1 indicate a lower likelihood of procrastinating academic tasks. None of the background variables (gender, age, marital status, academic status, and length of stay), were found to be statistically significant. However, perception of language ability was found to be statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of English proficiency increased the likelihood of academic procrastination among Asian international students (log odds .391,  $p < .05$ , odds ratio 1.478). Total acculturative stress was not a statistically significant predictor of academic procrastination. Further, two of the three coping styles were found to be statistically significant; students who engage in avoidance coping were more likely to procrastinate academic tasks (log odds .485,  $p < .05$ , odds ratio

1.581), while students who developed collective coping strategies were less likely to delay work on academic tasks (log odds  $-.602$ ,  $p < .01$ , odds ratio  $.548$ ). Finally, levels of academic self-efficacy were not found to be a statistically significant predictor of academic procrastination among Asian international students.

**Table 1: Logistic Regression model and model evaluation: Predictors for Asian International students' likelihood of Academic Procrastination**

Predictors	B Coefficient	SE	Odds Ratio
Gender	.162	.330	1.176
Age	-.043	.050	.958
Marital Status	.224	.614	1.251
Academic Status	-.246	.400	.782
Duration of Stay in U.S.	.315	.344	1.370
Language	.391*	.196	1.478
Total Acculturation	.088	.052	1.092
Avoidance Coping	.458*	.231	1.581
Engagement Coping	-.037	.191	.964
Collective Coping	-.602**	.205	.548
Academic Efficacy	-.165	.144	.848
Overall Model Evaluation	69%		
Predicted Probabilities			
Goodness-of-fit test	<i>df</i>	Sig.	
Hosmer & Lemeshow	8	.742	

Significant variables are labeled with asterisks \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate that collective coping, avoidance coping, and language ability are the three strongest predictors of procrastination in Asian international students. Collective coping is a negative predictor of academic procrastination; students who develop collective coping strategies tend to be less likely to delay work on academic tasks. This finding suggests that the Asian collectivistic culture, which values group work and social support, may alleviate the stress of adapting to a new environment and therefore better enable students to focus on academic tasks. The same idea can apply to avoidance coping considering that this strategy contradicts Asian cultural values. Asian students who hold strong collectivistic values may find themselves alienated when they engage in avoidance coping, which might contribute to the stress they experience as they adjust to the new setting and distract them from their academic tasks. The language ability variable was positively related to academic procrastination, suggesting that students who

have higher language ability are more likely to procrastinate. Here, it appears that a perceived high level of English language ability might actually increase the likelihood of academic procrastination among Asian international students, though previous research had suggested a positive association between academic adjustment and English language skills (Poyrazli et al., 2001).

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Although existing research has focused on the relationship between personal and environmental factors and procrastination (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), very limited research has examined predictors of academic procrastination among Asian international students. Despite their growing presence on US campuses, the needs and concerns of Asian international students are frequently overlooked (Mori, 2000). Therefore, it is important to investigate Asian international students' academic procrastination, in order to provide insight into the creation of successful strategies for intervention and remediation. The development of such strategies will be particularly important for counselors, advisors, and faculty, especially since previous research has demonstrated that international students underutilize university student support services (Mori, 2000). Understanding the relationship between coping strategies, perceived language proficiency, and academic procrastination is an important step toward enabling institutions to better serve the needs of Asian international students. Based on our findings, it is crucial for university professionals to implement clinical services and to promote collective coping strategies to reduce procrastination behavior in this population. Understanding cultural differences in academic habits can assist in establishing initiatives focused on the academic success of Asian international students. Additional predictive of academic procrastination in Asian international students will need to be further explored. Future research with larger international student populations, including different types of institutions, different countries of origin, and various academic disciplines, will be needed to draw meaningful conclusions.

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