

Procrastination and the Preparation Process: A Study of Civil Service Aspirants

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Abstract

Academic procrastination, characterized by the intentional delay of academic tasks despite knowing its adverse consequences, is a widespread issue among students. This behavior becomes particularly concerning among civil service aspirants who face prolonged, high-stakes preparation with limited structure and external feedback. This study investigates the prevalence of academic procrastination and examines whether the duration of preparation significantly influences procrastination levels among civil service aspirants in Patna district, Bihar. To full-fill the objective of this study a sample of 400 civil service aspirants, who were actively preparing for civil service exams like UPSC and BPSC, were taken to maintain the relevance of the study. Data were collected using a standardized academic procrastination scale, Big Five Personality Inventory and a self-developed personal data sheet. To check the hypothesis of this study collected data were analyzed with the help of SPSS. Findings revealed a significantly high level of procrastination in this group $M=84.283$ in comparison to the hypothesized mean i.e. 74.1, challenging the H1 that average levels are typical. Moreover, aspirants with longer preparation durations exhibited significantly higher $t=5.07$ at the level of $p<0.001$ procrastination compared to those preparing for shorter periods. Findings of this study align with Temporal Motivation Theory and burnout literature, suggesting that sustained academic pressure without short-term reinforcement contributes to emotional fatigue and task avoidance. The findings emphasize the need for structured routines, self-regulation strategies, and institutional support to mitigate procrastination among long-term aspirants. This study fills a critical gap in literature by focusing on a population that is often overlooked in academic psychology, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals supporting civil service aspirants.

Keywords: Academic Procrastination, Civil Service Aspirants, Duration of Preparation

Introduction

Academic procrastination, the tendency to postpone academic tasks despite potential negative consequences, is a pervasive issue among students, impacting their well-being and academic success. Civil service aspirants, individuals preparing for highly competitive examinations for government positions, face immense pressure to excel, potentially exacerbating procrastination tendencies. While research has linked structured daily routines to reduced procrastination in general student populations and, less is known about this relationship

among the unique demographic of civil service aspirants. Furthermore, how a long duration preparation can affect the level of procrastination among this population remain underexplored. The aim of the present study is to bridge the gap in current literature about the duration of preparation and academic procrastination among the unique population.

Academic Procrastination

Academic procrastination is a distinct form of procrastination that manifests within the context of academic tasks and responsibilities. It can be characterized as the voluntary and irrational postponement of academic activities, despite the individual's awareness that such delay is likely to result in negative consequences. Key features of academic procrastination include:

- Voluntary nature: It represents a conscious choice to postpone tasks, rather than simply forgetting or feeling overwhelmed.
- Irrationality: The delay occurs even when the individual recognizes that procrastination will likely lead to undesirable outcomes.
- Task-specificity: It pertains specifically to academic endeavors, such as studying, completing assignments, attending classes, or preparing for examinations.
- Negative consequences: Procrastination often leads to increased stress, anxiety, guilt, poor academic performance, and diminished well-being.

While occasional procrastination is common, persistent academic procrastination can become a significant problem, hindering academic progress and overall well-being.

Civil Service Aspirants

Civil service aspirants are individuals who are preparing for highly competitive examinations to secure prestigious and desirable government positions, such as administrative, executive, or technical roles. These examinations are often seen as a reliable path to social mobility and financial stability, particularly in developing countries. Civil service aspirants face immense pressure to excel academically, as securing a government position is viewed as a prestigious career opportunity. Given the high-stakes nature of these examinations, civil service aspirants may experience heightened levels of academic procrastination, potentially exacerbated by the demanding study schedules and intense competition they face in their pursuit of these coveted government jobs.

Duration of Preparation

Intensity of these examinations' competitiveness enforces aspirants to prepare for it till multiple attempts. Almost till the allowed attempts get exhausted. That means they must have to prepare for years to crack it. This whole period of the study is termed as Duration of Preparation. In this present study we try to find out how the Duration of Preparation affects Level to procrastinate in the aspirant preparing in Patna district of Bihar. For number of aspirants, procrastination has chances to get increased along with increase in the Duration of Preparation. Thus, in this study effect of Duration of Preparation on Procrastination is

explored in such a way that findings can be used for increasing the effectiveness of the aspirants.

Review of Literature:

Academic procrastination refers to the intentional delay of academic tasks despite awareness of potential negative consequences (Steel, 2007). It is widely considered a form of self-regulatory failure and is highly prevalent among student populations, with research showing that 50% to 70% of college students procrastinate on academic tasks (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). The consequences of procrastination are far-reaching, including poor academic performance, increased anxiety, diminished well-being, and poor time management (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). These effects are especially concerning for individuals engaged in high-stakes, long-duration academic goals, such as civil service examination aspirants.

Civil service aspirants represent a unique population within the academic domain. Unlike students in formal institutions, these aspirants often prepare in self-directed, unstructured environments without fixed timelines or regular evaluation. The absence of institutional support mechanisms, combined with prolonged uncertainty, high societal expectations, and repeated examination cycles, places them at increased risk of academic disengagement and procrastination. Despite growing research on procrastination in traditional academic settings, little empirical work has focused on civil service aspirants, who arguably face more intense motivational and emotional challenges over extended preparation periods.

One critical yet underexplored factor is the duration of preparation and its psychological effects. Aspirants who engage in multi-year study efforts often face emotional exhaustion, reduced confidence, and mental fatigue, which may contribute to chronic procrastination. Research in other long-term academic contexts, such as doctoral training, supports this view; prolonged academic effort without clear reinforcement is associated with burnout and disengagement (Hen & Goroshit, 2014). Maslach and Jackson's (1981) burnout theory suggests that continuous exposure to stress without sufficient progress leads to emotional exhaustion, a known precursor of avoidance behaviors like procrastination. Additionally, Steel (2007) noted that delayed rewards lower task utility and intrinsic motivation, further exacerbating the tendency to delay.

Two theoretical models offer explanatory frameworks for understanding procrastination among this population. The Temporal Motivation Theory (Steel & Konig, 2006) posits that procrastination arises when tasks are perceived as low in expectancy and value, coupled with delayed rewards and impulsiveness all of which are characteristic of civil service exam preparation. Similarly, Zimmerman's (2002) Self-Regulated Learning Theory emphasizes that those who fail to plan, monitor, and regulate their learning effectively are more prone to procrastinate. Civil service aspirants, in the absence of structured support, must rely entirely on internal regulation, making self-regulatory deficits a central concern.

Regardless of these insights, the literature lacks systematic investigation into how preparation duration and lack of structure affect procrastination among civil service aspirants. Few studies offer empirical comparisons based on years of preparation, and even fewer explore the interaction of emotional fatigue, motivation, and self-regulation in this specific group.

Therefore, the present study aims to fill this significant gap by examining the relationship between academic procrastination and preparation duration among civil service aspirants, using established theoretical frameworks to interpret the findings.

Objectives:

1. To identify the prevalence and severity of academic procrastination among civil service aspirants in Patna district.
2. To examine the effect of duration of preparation on the academic procrastination.

Hypothesis:

- H1 “There will be average prevalence of academic procrastination among civil service aspirants.”
- H2 “Subjects with long duration of preparation (in years) will experience more academic procrastination in comparison to subject with short duration of preparation.”

Methodology:**Design:**

The present utilized a quantitative cross-sectional design to find the effect of duration of preparation among civil service aspirants of Patna.

Sample: 400 civil service aspirants from different coaching centers and library were selected to maintain the relevance of the study.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Aspirants actively preparing for civil service examination such as Upsc, Bpsc and other state pcs.(to ensure relevance).
- Age group of 21 years to 31years
- Both male and female aspirants
- Aspirants who understand Hindi and English language

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals diagnosed with serious mental conditions
- Aspirants who has history of substance use and brain disorder
- Aspirants who do not want to fill up the questionnaire

Variable

- Independent variable- Duration of Preparation(In years)
- Dependent variable- Academic Procrastination

Measures

1. **Personal datasheet-** which is used to know the aspirants demographic details and daily study routine.
2. **Academic Procrastination-** scale to measure procrastination level in aspirants. This scale is developed by Dr. Savita Gupta and Liyaqat Bashir. This scale has 30 items which is divided in 5 dimensions. This scale has reliability coefficient of 0.76
3. **Procedure for data collection-** To facilitate data collection for this study, formal permission was sought from relevant authority. First, letters were sent to head librarians at prominent libraries frequented by civil service aspirants, requesting permission to conduct the study within their premises. These letters detailed the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations, emphasizing the voluntary and anonymous nature of participant involvement. Similarly, permission letters were addressed to the heads of coaching institutions that cater specifically to civil service aspirants. These letters outlined the study's relevance to their student population and assured them of minimal disruption to their regular schedules. Upon receiving permission from both librarians and coaching institution heads, researchers proceeded with participant recruitment and data collection activities as outlined in the approved protocol. The collected data were analyzed in SPSS version 21.

Results

Hypothesis 1: H1 “There will be average prevalence of academic procrastination among civil service aspirants.”

To find the average prevalence of academic procrastination among civil service aspirants of Patna district H1 was formulated which proposed that there is average prevalence of academic procrastination among the civil service aspirants of Patna district. To confirm this formulated hypothesis a one sample t-test is computed and the findings are given below in the table number 1.1.

Variable	Test value=74.1					
Academic Procrastination	N	M	SD	df	t-ratio	p-value
	400	84.283	17.79	399	11.44	P<0.001

Table No- 1.1: Findings of One Sample t-test

The table number 1.1 presents the mean scores with comparison with the test value of 74.1 of the participants to find the significant prevalence of academic procrastination among the civil service aspirants of Patna district. The test compared the M=84.283 and SD=17.79 with the hypothesized mean i.e. 74.1 Chaudhari and Manani (2021) which reveals that mean score of

academic procrastination among the civil service aspirants ($M=84.28$, $SD=17.79$) was significantly higher than the reference test value.

The result of the one sample t-test indicates that civil service aspirants in Patna experience a higher level of academic procrastination than average level. The mean score ($M=84.28$) shows that the procrastination is a widespread concern of this group which may affect their daily study routine, performance in exams and academic outcomes.

The findings suggest consistency to the previous research work for example Solomon and Rothblum (1984) first identify the problem of academic procrastination common among students, particularly when the work perceived as difficult and anxiety inducing. As well as Steel(2007) in his meta analytic review work concluded that students who are preparing for high stakes competitive faced high level of academic procrastination due to the fear of failure, perfectionism and lack of self-regulations. Preparation for the longer period often results in task aversiveness along with goal diffusion, which further leads to consistent procrastination, Owens and Newbegin (1997).

The increment in the extent of procrastination may be associated with the results' uncertainty, bulkiness of the syllabus as well as lack of mentorship towards structure of the preparation. It is almost common factor in the preparation cycle of aspirants of the civil services nationwide. Strategizing, regulating and managing; schedule, syllabus as well as emotions will prove to be kind of reinforcement in this context.

Hence the H1 is rejected; as the result indicates, "the level of procrastination among the aspirants of the civil services exam is very high."

Hypothesis 2: "Subjects with long duration of preparation (in years) will experience more academic procrastination in comparison to subject with short duration of preparation."

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-ratio	p-value
Aspirants Preparing for shorter duration	185	80.20	14.80	398	5.07	<0.001
Aspirants Preparing for longer duration	215	89.10	16.40			

** $p<0.001$

Table No- 2.1: Findings of Independent Sample t-test

In order to test H2, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare academic procrastination scores between the groups; one who prepared for shorter duration and another one who prepared for longer duration.

The differences in the finding were: For those who prepared for the shorter duration $M=80.20$, $SD=14.80$, who prepared for the longer duration $M=89.10$, $SD=16.40$, $t\text{-ratio}=5.07$ and significance at $p<0.001$.

This result shows a statistically significant difference between the group; one who have been preparing for shorter duration and another one who have been preparing for longer duration, in terms of academic procrastination. One having longer duration procrastinate more than one having shorter duration. Thus we can say that increase in the extent of procrastination can be caused by the factor i.e. duration of preparation too.

Temporal Motivation Theory hypothesized the increase in procrastination due to distant deadlines or declining motivation over time. Having several years of preparation often results into reduction in the clarity of objectives and burnout, which further results in task avoidance too; Steel (2007). Due to the long term exposure of academic activities, if not getting frequent appreciation and remuneration, aspirants start to rely on the procrastination as a coping strategy and face psychological fatigue too; Sirois (2014). Van Erde (2003) addressed that planning without efficient time management structure, in terms of longer goal, are vulnerable to procrastinatory behaviour.

The finding presents that factors such as scheduled planning, regular evaluation and reinforcement- both positive as well as negative, play critical role in the outcomes of the preparation for the civil service aspirants. While lacking these things, time passes and amount of stress keeps on increasing, this further leads in adaptation of maladaptive coping strategies like: procrastination.

Hence H2 is strongly supported; as the result demonstrates obvious proportional relation between duration of preparation and the level of academic procrastination.

Discussion:

The findings of the present study provide insight into the prevalence and predictors of academic procrastination among civil service aspirants. The first hypothesis, which assumed an average level of procrastination, was not supported. Instead, results showed that procrastination levels are significantly higher than average, suggesting that civil service aspirants are particularly vulnerable to this behavior. This may be attributed to the self-paced, unstructured, and high-stakes nature of the civil service exam preparation process. These results are in line with Steel's Temporal Motivation Theory (2007), which suggests that tasks with delayed rewards and low structure often elicit procrastination. The civil services preparation process is notably long, lacks immediate feedback, and places the burden of discipline entirely on the aspirant-conditions conducive to chronic task delay. The second hypothesis was confirmed, revealing that aspirants preparing for a longer duration (multiple years) demonstrate significantly more procrastination than those preparing for a shorter period. This finding can be interpreted through the lens of burnout theory and task aversiveness (Sirois, 2014). Prolonged exposure to competitive stress, monotony, and failure without immediate reinforcement may lead aspirants to delay preparation as a maladaptive coping mechanism. This finding is consistent with Van Eerde's (2003) meta-analytic evidence linking extended duration and chronic stress to elevated procrastination. It is also possible

that initial failures or unmet goals in earlier attempts reduce self-efficacy and increase avoidance behavior, further reinforcing a cycle of procrastination. These results highlight the psychological toll of long-term competitive exam preparation and point to the need for early intervention, structured routines, and psychological support for aspirants.

Conclusion

The study concludes that academic procrastination is significantly prevalent among civil service aspirants and is positively associated with the duration of preparation. Aspirants who spend longer periods preparing tend to procrastinate more, likely due to reduced structure, increased stress, and waning motivation over time. These findings underscore the importance of promoting routine-based study practices, time management training, and mental health support systems tailored specifically for this unique academic population. Stakeholders such as coaching centers, mentors, and policymakers should consider these psychological dimensions when designing programs for aspirants. Future research should explore additional factors such as gender, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and support networks in relation to procrastination among this group. A longitudinal design could further validate the observed relationship between preparation duration and procrastination.

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