Procrastination in fourth-level university students and its impact on learning quality

Procrastinación en estudiantes universitarios de cuarto nivel y su impacto en la calidad del aprendizaje

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Abstract

Procrastination among university students is a highly relevant phenomenon in the academic field, as it has significant repercussions on both performance and learning excellence. The purpose of this study is to determine how procrastination affects fourth-level university students and the quality of their learning, using a university in Guayaquil, Ecuador, as a case study during the year 2023. To this end, a quantitative approach with a non-empirical causal correlational design was used, randomly selecting 100 participating students. The results obtained reveal that the tendency to postpone academic activities is directly related to the quality of learning. In this sense, a significant negative correlation was identified between self-perception of skills and the quality of learning ($\beta = -0.576$, $p = 0.000$), as well as a negative correlation between self-discipline and willingness to learn ($\beta = -0.500$, $p < 0.000$). In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of exploring and implementing programs aimed at improving time management, with the goal of strengthening self-discipline and self-perception of skills. This will enhance educational quality in the university setting, promote stronger academic engagement, and, at the same time, reduce levels of procrastination among students.

Keywords: procrastination, learning, higher education.

Resumen

La procrastinación entre los estudiantes universitarios se presenta como un fenómeno de gran relevancia en el ámbito académico, ya que tiene repercusiones significativas tanto en el desempeño como en la excelencia del aprendizaje. El presente estudio tiene como propósito determinar de qué manera la procrastinación incide en los alumnos universitarios de cuarto nivel y en la calidad de su aprendizaje, tomando como caso de análisis una universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador, durante el año 2023. Para ello, se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo con un diseño correlacional causal no empírico, seleccionando aleatoriamente a 100 estudiantes participantes. Los resultados obtenidos revelan que la tendencia a postergar actividades académicas mantiene una relación directa con la calidad del aprendizaje. En este sentido, se identificó una correlación negativa significativa entre la autopercepción de habilidades y la calidad del aprendizaje ($\beta = -0.576$, $p = 0.000$), así como una correlación negativa entre la autodisciplina y la disposición para el aprendizaje ($\beta = -0.500$, $p < 0.000$). En conclusión, los hallazgos subrayan la importancia de explorar e implementar programas orientados a mejorar la gestión del tiempo, con el objetivo de fortalecer la autodisciplina y la autopercepción de habilidades. De esta manera, se busca potenciar la calidad educativa en el entorno universitario, promover un compromiso académico más sólido y, al mismo tiempo, reducir los niveles de procrastinación entre los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: procrastinación, aprendizaje, educación superior.

Introduction

Academic procrastination, a widespread phenomenon among university students globally, negatively impacts the quality of learning. Various international studies, such as those conducted by Aznar et al. (2020) and Espín (2023), have highlighted its effects in both Europe and Latin America. In the case of Peru, although there are discrepancies in the findings, studies like those by Stewart et al. (2016) and Negrón et al. (2023) indicate high levels of procrastination among university students. Conversely, in Ecuador, Zumárraga & Cevallos (2022) found a significant relationship between procrastination and sleep quality, while Medina et al. (2023) documented its specific impact in the city of Guayaquil. This phenomenon, often attributed to a lack of motivation and poor time management, typically results in low academic performance, frequent distractions from social media, and high levels of stress.

In various countries, several authors have addressed the causes and consequences of procrastination in the university setting. For instance, Gil et al. (2020) in Spain, Ramos et al. (2021) in Mexico, Estremadoiro & Schulmeyer (2021) in Bolivia, and other researchers in Peru have delved into this phenomenon. Factors such as teacher influence (Ramos et al., 2021), self-perception of skills (Burgos & Salas, 2020), and time management (Gayoso, 2019) have been explored, demonstrating a significant impact on academic performance.

In the Ecuadorian context, studies like that of Zumárraga & Cevallos (2022) have analyzed the relationship between procrastination, self-efficacy, and academic performance. Similarly, research conducted by Medina et al. (2023) at the University of Guayaquil has examined the connection between procrastination and academic motivation. Furthermore, the correlation between procrastination and anxiety has been investigated (Altamirano & Rodríguez, 2021), as well as its impact on student stress (Méndez, 2021).

Additionally, research such as that by Cornejo (2021) at the Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil has explored the relationship between self-efficacy and procrastination among dental students, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and its effects in the educational context of Guayaquil. In this regard, learning theories provide a comprehensive view of procrastination and its influence on the quality of learning. For example, the Meaningful Learning Theory by Ausubel (1983) emphasizes the importance of connecting new knowledge with prior understanding. Likewise, the Constructivism Theory by Piaget and Vygotsky, cited by Hilario (2022), underscores the active construction of knowledge by the student. On the other hand, the Cognitive Load Theory by Sweller (1988) highlights how complex tasks can deplete cognitive resources, thereby favoring procrastination. Finally, the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory by Beck (1967) offers strategies to address dysfunctional thought and behavior patterns associated with procrastination.

Consequently, this research is justified by its theoretical relevance, as it provides valuable information for future studies and the design of strategies aimed at preventing procrastination. It is also feasible and practical, addressing a felt need within the educational community and proposing concrete measures to mitigate this problem.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to determine the incidence of procrastination among fourth-level university students and its impact on the quality of learning, using a university in Guayaquil, Ecuador,

as a case study during the year 2023. Specific objectives include identifying the effects of self-discipline, emotional factors, self-perception of skills, as well as organization and planning on the quality of learning.

Methodology

This research was developed under a quantitative approach, which allowed for the collection of numerical data and the performance of rigorous statistical analyses to examine the relationship between procrastination and the quality of learning among fourth-level university students (Hernández et al., 2018). This approach facilitated a precise and objective understanding of the variables under study, as well as the identification of potential causal correlations between them. Additionally, it enabled the generalization of results to a broader population of university students.

Regarding the type of research, a basic investigation was chosen, grounded in theoretical and fundamental knowledge, as proposed by Reyes et al. (2020), aiming to deepen the understanding of the relationship between procrastination and the quality of learning among fourth-level university students. Thus, the research sought to establish the theoretical foundations for future studies. To achieve these objectives, a non-experimental design was employed, according to Matas (2023), with a correlational causal depth level, since it aimed to establish causal relationships between procrastination and the quality of learning (Hernández, 2018).

In terms of temporal design, the study is cross-sectional, as data were collected from students at a single point in time, aiming to analyze the relationship between procrastination and the quality of learning at that specific moment, as noted by Müggenburg et al. (2007), without conducting a longitudinal follow-up. Similarly, the research is descriptive, as its primary goal was to describe and characterize procrastination among fourth-level university students and its impact on the quality of learning (Arias, 2019). To this end, data were collected through questionnaires and statistical analyses were applied to obtain a detailed view of the variables under study.

Regarding the population, it was finite and consisted of 134 fourth-level students from the Technical Nursing Major in the evening shift at the Instituto Tecnológico Bolivariano. The sample, which was representative and probabilistic, included 100 students aged between 20 and 40 years, of both genders, and at the fourth academic level. This selection had a reliability level of 95% and an allowable margin of error of 0.5% (Reyes et al., 2019).

For data collection, the survey method was employed, utilizing questionnaires as the primary tool, in accordance with Arias (2019). It is noteworthy that the questionnaire was specifically designed to assess procrastination and its impact on the quality of learning among fourth-level students. Regarding the procrastination variable, the instrument developed by Trujillo & Noé (2020) was used, comprising 16 questions distributed across four dimensions: self-discipline (items 1-4), emotional factors (items 5-7), self-perception of skills (items 8-12), and organization and planning (items 13-16). Response options included: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always, utilizing a five-point Likert scale.

Finally, the instrument was validated through the judgment of three experts, following Hernández (2018), who provided professional opinions and ratings related to the research. Additionally, the questionnaire corresponding to the procrastination variable showed a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.744, while the instrument for the quality of learning variable presented a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.972, indicating excellent reliability in both questionnaires (López et al., 2019).

Results and discussion

Table 1

Analysis of linear regression data for the procrastination and the quality of learning variables

				Unstandardized coefficients		**Standardized coefficients**	
	Model	R	R^2	B	Standard errors	Beta	Sig. p-value
Ind. variable. Procrastination	1	0.468[a]	0.219	-0.507	0.097	-0.468	0.000[b]
Dep. variable. Quality of learning							

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Table 2
Correlations between procrastination and quality of learning variables

			Procrastination variable	Quality of learning variable
Spearman's Rho	Procrastination variable	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-0.460**
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	100	100
	Quality of learning variable	Correlation coefficient	-0.460**	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	100	100

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Tables 1 and 2 present the regression analysis, revealing a significant relationship between procrastination and the quality of learning (R2 = 0.468, p = 0.000, regression coefficient = -0.507). Furthermore, the findings from the Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ = -0.460, p = 0.000) indicate a significant negative association between both variables. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is supported, suggesting that as procrastination increases, the quality of learning tends to decrease, or vice versa.

Table 3
Analysis of linear regression data for the self-discipline dimension with the quality of learning variable

				Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
	Model	R	R^2	B	Standard errors	Beta	Sig. p-value
Self-discipline dimension	1	0.500[a]	0.250	-0.618	108	-0.500	0.000[b]
Dep. variable. Quality of learning							

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Table 4
Correlation between self-discipline dimension and quality of learning variable

			Self-discipline dimension	Quality of learning variable
Spearman's Rho	Self-discipline dimension	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-0.539**
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	100	100
	Quality of learning variable	Correlation coefficient	-0.539**	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	100	100

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

The results, presented in Tables 3 and 4, highlight that the self-discipline dimension significantly impacts the quality of learning, evidenced by an R squared of 25%. The standardized Beta coefficient of -0.500 indicates a negative relationship between self-discipline and the quality of learning. The hypothesis test confirms this finding, with a p-value of 0.000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho1). Additionally, the Spearman correlation, with a value of -0.539, supports the existence of a significant negative relationship, suggesting that as self-discipline decreases, the quality of learning tends to reduce notably, or vice versa.

Table 5

Analysis of linear regression data for emotional factors dimension with quality of learning variable

				Unstandardized coefficients		**Standardized coefficients**	
	Model	R	R^2	B	Standard errors	Beta	Sig. p-value
Emotional factors dimension	1	0.053 [a]	0.003	-0.069	0.130	-0.053	0.597 [b]
Dep. variable. Quality of learning							

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Table 6

Correlation between emotional factors dimension and quality of learning variable

			Emotional factors dimension	**Quality of learning variable**
Spearman's Rho	Emotional factors dimension	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-0.046
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	0.648
		N	100	100
	Quality of learning variable	Correlation coefficient	-0.046	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	0.648	.
		N	100	100

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Tables 5 and 6 show that the coefficient of determination (R2) is 0.053, indicating that only 5.3% of the variability in the quality of learning can be attributed to emotional factors. In terms of hypothesis testing, no significant negative impact is evidenced, as the p-value associated with emotional factors is 0.597, leading to the failure to reject the null hypothesis. These results suggest that, although there is a weak negative relationship between emotional factors and quality of learning, this relationship is not statistically significant, indicating that other factors may have a more relevant influence on the quality of learning.

Table 7

Analysis of linear regression data for self-perception of skills dimension with quality of learning variable

				Unstandardized coefficients		**Standardized coefficients**	
	Model	R	R^2	B	Standard errors	Beta	Sig. p-value

Self-perception of skills dimension Dep. variable. Quality of learning	1	0.576[a]	0.332	-0.800	0.115	-0.576	0.000[b]

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Table 8

Correlations between the self-perception of skills dimension and the learning quality variable

			Quality of learning variable	Self-perception of skills dimension
Spearman's Rho	Quality of learning variable	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-0.585**
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	100	100
	Self-perception of skills dimension	Correlation coefficient	-0.585**	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	100	100

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

The results of the regression analysis reveal that the coefficient of determination (R2) of 0.576 indicates that approximately 57.6% of the variability in learning quality can be explained by the self-perception of skills dimension. The hypothesis test supports the existence of a significant negative impact, as the associated p-value for this dimension is 0.000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that as self-perception of skills decreases, the quality of learning tends to decrease significantly, and vice versa.

Table 9

Linear regression data analysis for the organization and planning dimension

				Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
	Model	R	R^2	B	Standard errors	Beta	Sig. p-value
Organization and planning dimension Dep. variable. Quality of learning	1	0.101[a]	0.010	-0.144	0.143	-0.101	0.316[b]

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

Table 10

Correlation between the organization and planning dimension and the learning quality variable

			Organization and planning dimension	Quality of learning variable
Spearman's Rho	Organization and planning dimension	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-0.108
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	0.283
		N	100	100

Quality of learning variable	Correlation coefficient	-0.108	1.000
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.283	.
	N	100	100

Note: Procrastination and quality of learning questionnaire applied to students

While the results presented in Tables 9 and 10 suggest a limited impact of the organization and planning dimension on learning quality, it is crucial to analyze these findings in detail. The coefficient of determination (R2) of 0.101 indicates that only 10.1% of the variability in learning quality can be attributed to this dimension. Additionally, the hypothesis test does not support a significant negative impact, as the associated p-value for organization and planning is 0.316, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. In other words, although there is an association between organization and planning and learning quality, this relationship is not statistically significant, suggesting that other factors may exert a more substantial influence on learning quality.

It is essential to remember that procrastination does affect university students and impacts their academic performance. In fact, the data presented reveal that most respondents exhibit advanced (45%) and moderate (43%) levels of procrastination, while in terms of learning quality, low (35%) and moderate (44%) levels predominate. Furthermore, there is a significant inverse relationship between procrastination and learning quality (Rho = -0.460 and p = 0.000), suggesting that procrastination plays an important role in the learning efficiency of university students.

This assertion is grounded in the constructivist principles proposed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who argue that procrastination can act as an obstacle in constructing knowledge, resulting in poor academic performance. Constructivism emphasizes the dynamic involvement of the student in the formation of their knowledge. In the university setting, procrastination impedes the learning process by postponing essential activities, hinders adaptation by restricting necessary guidance, disrupts vital social interaction and collaboration, and complicates the gradual evolution of knowledge according to Piaget's theory. In this sense, the findings indicate a significant and opposite correlation between procrastination and learning excellence, supporting the notion that procrastination obstructs dynamic participation, collaboration, and the continuous building of knowledge, generating a detrimental impact on university academic performance.

Delving deeper into this point, in the university context, procrastination adversely affects the learning process by delaying crucial tasks. According to Piaget's theory, knowledge construction progresses gradually through confronting and overcoming challenges, but procrastination can interfere by avoiding timely engagement with academic tasks. Moreover, procrastination hinders adaptation by limiting necessary guidance. Knowledge construction, according to constructivism, involves the assimilation of new information in relation to the existing cognitive structure, and procrastination can restrict the time available to process and assimilate this information efficiently.

In line with this perspective, we find support in the research conducted by Estremadoiro et al. (2021), which indicates that procrastination is a common behavior among university students, predominantly manifesting at a moderate level. Additionally, the results of study carried out by Estrada (2021) reveal a high and significant presence of academic procrastination among university students. These findings confirm a widespread occurrence of procrastination among university students, particularly at advanced and moderate levels, suggesting a marked prevalence of academic procrastination in this student population and emphasizing the urgent need to address procrastination in educational environments to foster more effective participation and improve academic performance.

On the other hand, it is crucial to consider that the quality of learning is intrinsically linked to key indicators such as resistance to distractions, goal achievement, behavior control, and effective study or work strategies. The consistent application of these elements not only enhances learning capacity but also establishes a solid foundation for substantial quality in the educational or work process.

This research also demonstrates that a significant portion of university students exhibited a medium level (51%) in the self-discipline dimension, and a substantial negative relationship was found between self-discipline and learning quality (Rho = -0.500 and p < 0.000). These results suggest that self-discipline is strongly linked to the academic performance of university students, highlighting the crucial importance of goal achievement, effective study strategies, and distraction management in the educational process. In this sense, students with high self-discipline are more likely to achieve academic objectives and generate quality learning, emphasizing their role as a key predictor of academic success and a fundamental element for cultivating perseverance, organization, and

dedication in the pursuit of knowledge. Consequently, these findings support the relevance of integrating self-discipline into educational programs to enhance both academic performance and the holistic development of university students.

These discoveries align with the results obtained by Zumárraga & Cevallos (2022), who argued that higher self-efficacy could be linked to greater self-discipline, as both may contribute to a greater ability to autonomously control and organize the learning process. Similarly, these results correspond with the study by Cornejo (2021), which identified a significant negative correlation between procrastination and academic self-efficacy or self-discipline in students.

In other words, the study reveals that self-discipline has a significant impact on learning quality, showing an important negative relationship supported by statistical evidence. This finding is consistent with established theories and previous studies, solidifying self-discipline as a crucial element that notably influences learning performance in higher education. Consequently, these results underscore the importance of self-discipline in the academic realm, highlighting its essential contribution to improving learning quality. Additionally, the analysis of the research also suggests that self-discipline not only affects learning quality but also plays a fundamental role in efficient time management and the ability to face academic challenges. We observe that students who demonstrate higher self-discipline tend to organize their tasks more effectively, resulting in greater productivity and more successful navigation of academic obstacles.

Furthermore, Pulido et al. (2017) indicate in their theory that the influence of emotional factors on learning quality is significant and does not present a negative impact, emphasizing the importance of considering other aspects in understanding this dynamic educational environment. These findings align with the research conducted by Altamirano & Rodríguez (2021), which hints at a partial relationship between procrastination and anxiety. Academic procrastination and anxiety in relation to courses were also investigated, corroborating the proposed hypothesis. Similarly, Méndez (2021) points out that most respondents experience stress due to the postponement of activities, attributing this issue to virtual education. Additionally, Medina et al. (2023) demonstrated that there is a connection between intrinsic motivation and procrastination in activities.

Finally, regarding self-perception of skills, it is related to procrastination and learning quality, influencing the time management dedicated to academic activities. The results presented show that 56% of students are at a medium level. The marked negative relationship indicates that as self-perception of skills decreases, the quality of learning tends to decline. In other words, self-perception of skills is linked to procrastination and learning quality, affecting time management and academic dedication.

Similarly, the theoretical foundations of Boillos (2018) argue that procrastination may be connected with self-perception of skills through various elements such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, and skill development. In this sense, the relationship between procrastination and self-perception broadens the understanding of how subjective perceptions of competence and personal worth can influence time management and the completion of academic tasks. Addressing these aspects from a more holistic perspective could provide effective strategies to mitigate procrastination and improve both academic efficiency and self-perception of performance.

In simple terms, this research highlights that the perception of skills is closely related to procrastination and educational level, affecting time organization and academic dedication. The decline in self-perception of skills is negatively correlated with learning quality, supported by statistical evidence. Accurate self-assessment, confidence, and self-efficacy emerge as key factors that enhance the quality of learning by reducing the propensity for procrastination.

Lastly, it is important to remember that planning and organization are skills that contribute to efficient time management and academic commitment, benefiting learning quality. Our data indicate that 54% of university students are at a medium level regarding these skills. Nevertheless, as mentioned at the outset, the coefficient of determination suggests that only 10.1% of the variability in learning quality can be explained by organization and planning, indicating a weak relationship.

Despite this, theories support the need to empower students to manage their time, plan, and oversee their learning process, resulting in improved quality of their learning outcomes. According to Morillo (2020), this approach is considered crucial. Similarly, Siles et al. (2018) argue that structured planning is essential for the success of any entity, as it facilitates the systematic coordination of various processes and tasks, ensuring the achievement of objectives within the established timeframe. In this sense, although time management and planning are essential for learning quality and reduce procrastination, their impact, according to our results, is minimal. In other words, despite the importance attributed to organized planning, strategic flexibility, and organizational management, these factors do not significantly influence the quality of learning in terms of

procrastination. In this regard, excellence in learning appears to depend more on specific factors such as intrinsic motivation, self-discipline, and self-assessment of skills.

Conclusions

In summary, this research has demonstrated that academic procrastination is a determining factor in the decline of learning quality among fourth-level university students. Through quantitative analysis, a significant inverse correlation between both variables has been established, reinforcing the hypothesis that high levels of procrastination negatively impact academic performance. This finding aligns not only with the principles of educational theories such as constructivism, which emphasize the importance of active student participation in the learning process, but also underscores the need to implement strategies that strengthen self-discipline, organization, and self-perception of skills, especially considering the identified trends in moderate to high levels of procrastination.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this research confirm that procrastination is a widespread behavior among university students, affecting not only their academic performance but also their emotional well-being. The association of this phenomenon with variables such as anxiety, stress, and demotivation, observed both locally and in international studies, highlights the urgency of developing intervention programs that integrate emotional self-regulation tools and time management, as well as pedagogical models based on neuroeducation and cognitive-behavioral theories to effectively address the dysfunctional patterns that perpetuate this behavior.

Finally, the research provides a solid foundation for future actions within the educational realm, both in curricular planning and in the psychological and academic support for students. In conclusion, addressing procrastination requires a comprehensive approach that considers the personal, cognitive, and contextual dimensions of the student. The methodological design adopted has allowed for an accurate understanding of the magnitude of the problem at the Instituto Tecnológico Bolivariano, which can serve as a reference for interventions in other higher education institutions. Therefore, it is recommended to implement training strategies that promote healthy study habits, thereby enhancing the quality of learning in university education.

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