Analysis of Optimism and Procrastination in Students Who are Writing Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Obstacles faced by students whilst preparing their thesis could lead to a decline in their motivation. Thus, they will prefer to procrastinate instead of trying to finish their thesis work. It is believed that procrastination is highly correlated with optimism. Hence, this study aims to investigate the correlation between optimism and procrastination among college students who are working on their thesis. The study implemented a quantitative method with a purposive sampling technique. A total of 70 students had participated in this study as they could satisfy the required criteria for research participants, i.e., students of Psychology Faculty Universitas Negeri Makassar who are taking thesis courses in the 2010-2012 class and have obtained a supervisor. Data obtained in this study were analysed using the Spearman correlation test. The result of the data analysis shows that the correlation coefficient (r) and significance (p) value is -0.4404 and 0.000137 ($p < 0,01$), respectively. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted. The data shows that optimism and procrastination of students who are writing their thesis has a very significant negative correlation. The higher the level of optimism of students who are writing a thesis, the lower the level of their procrastination in completing the thesis requirement. Accordingly, the finding of this research advocates the importance of instilling an optimistic mindset among college students whilst working on their thesis to avoid procrastination.

Keywords: Optimism, procrastination, student's thesis

1. INTRODUCTION

A thesis is a mandatory academic research project as one of the graduation requirements for undergraduate students. Reynolds and Thompson defined that the thesis is a scientific work written by undergraduate students at the end of their studies [1]. However, for some students, the thesis is an easy, frightening, and hindering graduation assignment. Students who were initially enthusiastic in preparing their thesis, along with the obstacles they faced in preparing their thesis, resulted in the decline of enthusiasm.

Bégin and Géarard explain that the obstacles experienced by students when preparing their thesis are difficulties in dealing with supervisors, difficulty in finding references and determining themes and titles, difficulties in mastering research methodology or concepts, health issues, and also time management issues for students who work or have activities outside the campus [2]. In addition, Marshall, in her research, explained two types of obstacles experienced by students in preparing their thesis, namely internal and external constraints [3]. Internal constraints occur in the form of

laziness, low motivation, fear of meeting the supervisor, difficulties in developing theories and finding references, and difficulties in time management. On the other hand, external constraints occur in the form of differences in perception between supervisors, difficulties in meeting the supervisors, and lack of guidance time.

Based on interviews conducted to seven students who programed the thesis, it was found that the types of obstacles often encountered by students when preparing their thesis were laziness, low motivation, despair, difficulty to meet with the supervisor, pressure from their family, difficulty in finding references and developing theories, differences in perceptions between supervisors, health problems, and difficulties in time management. The obstacles they faced while preparing their thesis have caused them to view the thesis as a hard task to finish. Consequently, students become accustomed to procrastinating their thesis requirements. Thus, the constraints in preparing the thesis has caused students to need longer time to complete their thesis.

The act of delaying to carry out a required task is called procrastination. Grunschel, Patrzek, Klingsieck, &

Fries explained the term procrastination as a tendency to delay in completing a task, by carrying out other activities that are not useful so that the required task becomes obstructed [4]. Thesis work that is often confronted with various problems has caused a tendency among students to do other activities, thus committing procrastination.

Procrastination is mostly carried out by individuals in every level of education and also in a professional environment. However, according to Ferrari, Johnson, and McCown [5], procrastination is highly pervasive among students at various levels of education. Burka and Yuen suggested the results of their study that 75% of undergraduate students did procrastination in completing academic assignments [6]. Saman in his research revealed that students of the Faculty of Psychology at Universitas Negeri Makassar who had very high levels of procrastination were 78.571% or 55 participants out of 70 participants [7]. The results of this study indicate that procrastination levels among students who are writing their thesis at the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Makassar is relatively high.

This phenomenon can also be seen from the initial data retrieval conducted on 33 students who are writing a thesis. The result of preliminary data collection showed that 82% of students (n=27) have a high level of procrastination, while the other 18% of students (n=6) have a low level of procrastination. It indicates that the majority of students from the preliminary data collection did procrastination in preparing their thesis. Based on data from the Thesis Bureau of the Faculty of Psychology UNM in January 2017, it was found that the average length of thesis completion since the title approval until the thesis defense session of 15 students was 10.5 months. The longest thesis completion is 15 months, while the quickest thesis completion is 6 months.

It has been described that procrastination could cause stress, depression, and anxiety. These effects contradict the impact of optimism since optimism could cause a stress-free life and also healthy social relationships and social functions [8]. Individuals with high optimism indicate that they have a higher expectation of the occurrence of positive events, whereas individuals with low optimism indicate that they have a higher expectation of the occurrence of negative events [9].

Based on research conducted by Solomon and Rothblum, the main cause of procrastination among students is the fear of failure and displeasure with assignments [5]. It is in line with the assertion of Anwar and Qonita, who explained that psychological condition is one of the factors that influence the occurrence of procrastination among students to do thesis work [10]. The thesis is seen as a heavy burden by students with low optimism, as they see it as a bad situation that will last for a long period of time.

Optimism is very important to be instilled in students so that they can overcome obstacles that may arise while they are striving to achieve their goals [11]. It is due to the positive views of an optimistic individual on their future along with their creativity in solving problems. The importance of optimism in dealing with obstacles when preparing a thesis is also supported by Seligman [12] which states that optimistic individual tends not to be easily discouraged since they have the ability to plan actions to solve certain problems and consistently trying to find a new possible solution when facing obstacles. Individual optimism regards failure as a temporary thing and can be changed so that it can succeed in the future.

Individuals will gain success in the future if they have high optimism and enthusiasm. Individuals with an optimistic mindset will have high self-confidence in carrying out daily work. Moreover, they tend to feel happy in life [13]. Accordingly, students who are optimistic about their thesis will stop all negative thoughts and beliefs in their abilities to complete thesis requirements [14].

Optimism and procrastination are deemed as an important topic to be discussed in this study since it is often experienced by students. The researchers in this study conducted further analysis on the relationship of optimism and procrastination among students who are developing their thesis since prior research has revealed that individuals with low optimism levels tend to procrastinate in completing a required task. Meanwhile, when individuals have a higher optimism level, they tend to be more resilient in facing problems. Thus, individuals with high optimism level rarely procrastinate, compared to individuals with low optimism [15].

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The quantitative research method was utilized in this study, which consists of two variables, namely optimism as variable 1 and procrastination as variable 2. The study population was 85 students of Psychology Faculty at Universitas Negeri Makassar who programed thesis and had obtained supervisors, while the sample was 70 students who are considered as representative based on the Krecjie table. The data in this study was collected by using a scale for each variable, namely the procrastination scale and optimism scale. Prior to data analysis, a prerequisite test is carried out in the form of item discrimination, validity, and reliability. The data analysis was conducted by giving a score for each item at each scale and inputted the score into the Microsoft Office Excel 2010 program. Data processing is done using the SPSS 23 program and K-Stat, a data processing application using a programming language.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Procrastination Data

The description of procrastination data for hypothetical and empirical means can be seen in Table 1.

The procrastination scale consists of 33 items with the score range from 1 to 5 for each item. The data on Table 1 shows that the hypothetical mean is 99 with a standard deviation of 22, while the empirical mean is 90.2, with a standard deviation of 17.8. The hypothetical and empirical data of the study showed that the lowest and the highest score was 33 and 165, respectively. Meanwhile, the empirical data showed the lowest and the highest score was 33 and 126, respectively.

Table 1. Description of Hypothetical and Empirical Procrastination Data

Variable	Hypothetical				Empirical			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Procrastination	33	165	99	22	33	126	90.2	17.8

The categorization of subjects' level of procrastination showed that 5 participants had a high procrastination level with a percentage of 7%, 42 subjects had a moderate level of procrastination with a percentage of 60%, and 23 subjects had a low level of procrastination with a percentage of 33%. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the procrastination level of the majority subjects in this study was in the medium category.

3.2. Optimism Data

The description of optimism data is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Description of Optimism Hypothetical Data

Variable	Hypothetical				Empirical			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Optimism	16	80	48	10.6	40	77	59.8	7.6

The optimism scale consists of 16 items, with the scores ranged from 1 to 5. The table above shows that the hypothetical mean is 48 with a standard deviation of 10.66, while the empirical mean is 59.8 with a standard deviation of 7.6. Hypothetical data results showed that the lowest and the highest score was 16 and 80, respectively. Meanwhile, the empirical data showed that the lowest and the highest score was 40 and 77, respectively. The categorization of subjects' level of optimism showed that 54 subjects had a high level of optimism with a percentage of 77%, 16 subjects had a moderate level of optimism with a percentage of 23%, and there were no subjects with a low level of optimism. This shows that the majority of subjects in this study have a high level of optimism.

3.3. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis in this study states that there is a negative relationship between optimism and procrastination in students who are writing their thesis. Hypothesis testing was conducted by using the Spearman correlation technique with the help of K-Stat, a data processing application using the R programming language.

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient (r) and the significance value (p) between optimism and procrastination variables in this study are -0.4403 and 0.000137, respectively. The rule used is if the significance value is below 0.01 (p <0.01) then the hypothesis is accepted. Since the significance value obtained is 0.000137 <0.01, the hypothesis in this study is accepted. The correlation coefficient r = -0.4403 indicates a negative correlation direction which is located in the medium category. Accordingly, the data in this study supported the assertion that that optimism and procrastination in students who are writing their thesis has a very significant negative correlation. If the students have a high optimism level, their procrastination level will be lower. Meanwhile, if the students have a low optimism level, their procrastination level will be higher.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable	r	p-value	Inf.
Optimism	-0.4403	0.000137	Very Significant
Procrastination		(p < 0.01)	Significant

3.4. Discussion

The finding of this study, based on the result of descriptive analysis, showed that most of the students who prepare their thesis at the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Makassar and also participates as the subjects of the study, had a moderate level of procrastination. The data is based on the results of the study subjects' scores, which showed that 5 subjects (7%) had high procrastination, 42 subjects (60%) had moderate

procrastination, and 23 subjects (33%) had low procrastination. The results of the categorization show that the majority of the subjects in this study have a moderate level of procrastination.

The study findings showed that the students of the Psychology Faculty at Universitas Negeri Makassar who are writing their thesis have a potential tendency to procrastinate, despite the fact that procrastination is not a habit for them. Procrastination characteristics among the students can be assessed based on procrastination aspects proposed by Ferrari et al. [5], which including the act of delaying in starting and finishing a task, the act of delaying in doing a task, the gap between the time of planning and the time of performance, and the act of carrying out more enjoyable activities [5].

The results of the descriptive analysis in this study also revealed that the majority of students who prepared their thesis at the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Makassar who participates as subjects in this study had a high level of optimism. The data of students' scores on the procrastination scale showed a total of 54 subjects (77%) have a high level of optimism, 16 subjects (23%) have a moderate level of optimism, and no subject has a low level of optimism. This finding indicates that the majority of research subjects have a relatively high level of optimism.

Permanence is an individual's way of looking at permanent and temporary events [12]. In the permanence aspects which consist of 5 items, a total of 51 subjects in this study were categorized in high category (73%). There were only 18 subjects (26%) categorized in the medium category and 1 subjects (1%) in the low category. Students who are categorized as having a high score on permanence aspects indicate that they have chosen more "very agree" and "agree" answers in the permanence aspects of the optimism scale items. The high score of permanence aspects obtained through the optimism scale reflects the high optimism of the subjects. The high permanence score obtained indicates that individuals with a high optimism view bad events as temporary, and good events as permanent things [12]. There was only one subject who was categorized in low permanence, which indicates that the subject answered more "very disagree" and "disagrees" on performance aspects items. Subjects with low scores on permanence aspects have low optimism. The low score of permanence reflects the condition that individuals view bad events as permanent, and view good events as temporary. Accordingly, their optimism level is categorized as low [12].

The hypothesis testing which was conducted in this study by using Spearman correlation showed that the correlation coefficient (r) and the significance value (p) obtained between optimism and procrastination in this study is -0.4403 and 0.000137 (p <0.01), respectively. It shows that optimism and procrastination of students who are writing their thesis has a very significant negative correlation. The higher the level of optimism of students

who are writing a thesis, the lower the level of their procrastination in completing the thesis requirement.

This study found that the optimism of students who are developing their thesis is in the high category, whilst the procrastination of the students is in the moderate category being headed to the low category. Students with a high level of optimism are confident with their abilities, are not easily discouraged, and will take advantage of various ways to deal with obstacles when preparing a thesis. Hence, the students do not procrastinate.

The finding of this study is supported by the result of a study conducted by Jackson et al. which advocates that individuals with a high level of optimism will have a low level of procrastination. Meanwhile, individuals with a low level of optimism tend to procrastinate during the completion process, either by delaying in starting the task or by carrying out more enjoyable activities [15]. Individuals categorized in high optimism levels tend to be more resilient in solving certain problems and rarely procrastinate in completing a required task, compared to individuals categorized in low optimism levels. It is asserted that one of the characteristics of procrastinators is a low level of optimism [16]. It is in line with the assertion of Carver Charles et al. that individuals who have a high optimism level will have a low tendency to procrastinate. On the other hand, individuals with a low optimism level will have a high tendency to procrastinate in completing certain tasks [17].

4. CONCLUSION

The result of hypothesis testing between optimism and procrastination in this study showed a correlation coefficient (r) and significance value (p) of -0.4403 and 0.000137 (p <0.01), respectively. Hence, this study advocates that optimism and procrastination in students who are writing their thesis has a very significant negative correlation.

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