Academic Procrastination and the Effect on Students’ Results for ICT Students
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ABSTRACT
Procrastination has been reported as a prevalent phenomenon in the general population, affecting a number of adults. Procrastination in academia may have particularly serious effects for students in tertiary education, whose academic lives are characterised by frequent deadlines. Indeed, it has been shown that university students who rated high on procrastination received low grades (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). In the present study, the relationship between procrastination and academic performance of tertiary education students enrolled on an ICT program was investigated. Participants were 186 students enrolled full-time on degree or diploma level qualifications within the ICT program at a New Zealand tertiary institution. There was evidence that the submission times of assessments were positively associated with the marks achieved. Also, ICT students who submitted their assessments early appeared to achieve higher marks than those who submitted their assessments closer to or after the deadlines.

KEYWORDS
Academic Performance, Academic Procrastination, Learning Strategies, Self-Regulation, Time Management

INTRODUCTION
In tertiary education, there are almost always deadlines by which students must submit coursework (Sheppard & McDermot, 1970, Born & Whelan, 1973; Semb, Glick & Spencer, 1979). Without deadlines, student procrastination would make course administration and teacher workload almost impossible to manage. It would also mean that students who take longer to prepare assignments would gain an unfair advantage over their peers who submit their coursework early. An ability to work to deadlines is also viewed as an important time management skill, which students must acquire in preparation for future employment.

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) investigated the relationship between procrastination on academic tasks of 342 college students and the reasons for such behaviour. Findings suggested that a high percentage of students reported problems with procrastination on several academic tasks, and that it was likely caused by a complex interaction of behavioural, cognitive, and affective components. Some of the reasons reported were deficits in study habits and time management.

Tertiary institutions use deadlines for assessed curricula, and in most cases, student achievement is measured only for the content assessed. Thus, students’ abilities to complete assessed work on time

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may affect their academic performance; indeed, it has been suggested that delayed work patterns are positively related to inferior academic performance (Lloyd & Knulzen, 1969, Schwarts, 1976). Vinothkumar, Koussayla, and Rai (2016) conducted a study of 250 undergraduate students to explore whether academic procrastination affected students’ academic performances, and reported a significant negative relationship between academic performance and procrastination.

Patton (2010) studied the records of 400 students in an open learning programme and concluded that flexible deadlines consistently led to better results. Studies have also shown that the presence of a deadline, regardless of its stability, created a sense of urgency in groups that in turn motivated attention to time (Lim & Murnighan, 1994; Parks & Cowlin, 1995; Okhuysen, 2001, Waller, Zellmer-Bruhn, & Giambatista, 2002).

While procrastination has been widely regarded as a negative phenomenon, Chu and Choi (2005) posited that not all procrastination behaviours are harmful or lead to negative consequences. Two types of procrastinators were identified, passive procrastinators; those who fail to complete tasks on time, and active procrastinators; those who prefer to work under pressure and make deliberate decisions to procrastinate. The latter were believed to have better use and control of time, self-efficacy belief, better coping styles, and better outcomes including academic performance (Chu & Choi, 2005). In the context of this study, procrastination referred to delayed completion of academic tasks.

Beswick, Rothblum and Mann (1988) examined procrastination of 245 students in a first-year Psychology course, and reported a significant negative correlation between self-reported procrastination and final course grade indicating that procrastination is detrimental to academic performance. Moreover, Tice and Baumeister (1997) reported that university students who rated high on procrastination received low grades. The purpose of this study therefore was to explore the relationship between procrastination and academic performance of students enrolled on an ICT program.

METHOD

Data were collected during the period February 2016 to December 2016. During this period, 603 individual assessments were submitted to 14 different ICT courses using an online learning platform tool. Of these assessments, 523 were submitted prior to the deadline, and 80 were submitted after the deadline. To ensure anonymity, no identifiable data were recorded (e.g., names of students, ages, and contact details).

For each of the assessments submitted, the submission time was recorded. For analysis, all submission times were converted into minutes. Although the institution applies penalties to all assessments submitted after the deadlines, all assessments submitted after the deadlines in this study were approved extensions, and did not incur any penalty.

The marks achieved for each of the submitted assessments were also recorded. For analysis, all the marks achieved were transmuted into marks out of 100%.

Data were analysed using SPSS version 22. Alpha was set at 0.05 and all tests were conducted as two tailed.

RESULTS

The variable ‘time’ was measured in minutes, where a score of zero means submitting an assessment exactly at the deadline, a positive score means submitting an assessment before the deadline, and negative for submitting after the deadline. The mean overall time of submission (for all students) was 1766.28 min before the deadline, SD = 5192.14, range = 48079.00 (before the deadline) to -23700.00 (after the deadline). Overall, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the time of submission and the mark achieved; the sooner a student submitted their assessments, the better the mark achieved, r = .302, n = 599, p < .001.
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