Causes of EFL Learners' Procrastination:
A Classical Grounded Theory

Saber Khooei-Oskooei [iD]

Ph.D. Candidate in ELT, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Tabriz, Iran

Saeideh Ahangari* [iD]

Assistant Professor of ELT, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Tabriz, Iran

Zohreh Seifoori [iD]

Associate Professor of ELT, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Tabriz, Iran

Abstract

In the long process of learning English as a foreign language, learners may become exhausted and, if not treated properly, decide to give up learning temporarily and even permanently. Therefore, it seems necessary to explore the reasons for their temporal delays and consider them appropriately to avoid permanent give-ups. As an attempt to determine the reasons for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' delays, the researchers in the present study explored their contributing factors through the application of a classical grounded theory approach which led to the development of Language Learning Procrastination (LLP) theory. The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 43 EFL learners in Tabriz, Iran, and were coded in open, selective, and theoretical coding stages through a Constant Comparative Method. The emerged theory involved a core category (i.e., Dilatory Behavior) indicating that EFL learners mostly procrastinate in five domains of doing exercises, preparation for an exam, submitting projects, starting up speaking, and learning to spell. Furthermore, three major categories of Learners' Characteristics, Environmental Conditions, and Task Features as the causes of Dilatory Behavior emerged during the iterative data collection and analysis procedures. The results of the study indicated that both EFL learners' characteristics and external factors related to the learning environment and language tasks are significant in shaping the EFL learners' procrastination. The theory of LLP can be applied in EFL settings to recognize the learners' sources of Dilatory Behavior and devise appropriate solutions for them.

Keywords: Procrastination, Dilatory behavior, Classical grounded theory, Categories, Concepts

*Corresponding author's email: saeideh.ahangari@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Any foreign/second language learning program commences with a variety of goals, plans, and intentions and any program developer has to reflect on a series of questions such as: "Why have the learners decided to learn a new language?", "How are they going to pass the labyrinth of language learning and becoming masters of that language?", "Where are the learners going to reach?", along with others. Although goal-setting, planning, and having intentions are necessary for progress in language learning, they are not sufficient conditions; all of them need to be accompanied by the learner's actions to develop a prosperous language learner. However, there are some mismatches between the learners' intentions and actions. When talking about goals, plans, intentions, and the gap between intention and action, right away the word procrastination comes up. Traditionally, procrastination has been a feature that gives the person negative connotations such as laziness or lack of ambition. Procrastination in language learning can be understood as knowing that one is supposed to, and possibly even want to, complete a language-related task but missing to perform the activity in the proper or expected period.

Research on procrastination has been performed progressively for over 30 years, but up to the recent decade, a comprehensive definition has not yet been agreed upon (Steel, 2010). Procrastination, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, embraces acts of putting off doing something until a future date, postponing, or delaying needlessly. However, it is defined in a variety of ways in the educational research literature. Some of the definitions, such as the one presented by Svartdal, Granmo, and Færevaag (2018), just considered its behavioral properties including the delaying of the task performance, whereas others considered the affective dimensions of procrastination and the feelings like anxiety and depression that procrastination raises in the procrastinator (e.g., Constantin, English, & Mazmanian, 2018; Ferrari, 2010). In this view, the purpose of procrastination seems to make one's life more pleasant, but it

almost always adds stress, disarrangement, and downfall. Furthermore, Steel and Klingsieck (2016) focused on the psychological context of procrastination and considered it as any delayed activity that involved an inconsistency between intention to act and manifested behavior. The core feature of this point of view is what happens in the space between a language learner's behavioral intentions and actual behaviors (Steel, Brothen, & Wambach, 2001). Hence, through blending various definitions, procrastination can be specified as a deferred performance of a task or objective which takes place when a person becomes illogically engaged with unnecessary behaviors which finally results in loss to complete the intended task in the due time or its low-quality completion. The achievement of goals is at the center of attention in this definition that expands previous ones in terms of going beyond focusing only on delay and postponement.

Having a theoretic eye, when all definitions of procrastination are compared, the agreement is that procrastination is an action or behavior that is not advantageous for the person involved in it (Balkis, Duru, & Duru, 2009). Kim and Seo (2015) contend that procrastination can have added negative effects due to task avoidance and this may be harmful to language learners. Therefore, procrastination in language learning can cause numerous problems for learners themselves and other entities involved in the learning and teaching processes.

However, in spite of the existing literature in general and academic procrastination (e.g., Klingsieck, 2013; Svartdal & Steel, 2017), to the best knowledge of the researchers, not only a clear scheme for procrastination in the area of language learning is missing, but also the research regarding procrastination, in its general sense, suffers various gaps in terms of its causes.

Moreover, the previous empirical research on procrastination has concentrated on academic procrastination, a typical example of which was postponing the assignments in out-of-class situations. For instance, in Afzal and Jami's (2018) study on university students, task aversiveness,

fear of failure, dependency, decision making, and risk-taking were found to be the most common reasons for academic procrastination. Similarly, Yurtseven and Akpur (2018) revealed that personality, anxiety, motivation, obligations, and task difficulty are the causes of academic procrastination.

Based on the mentioned gap in the literature, the researchers decided to conduct a more in-depth study to conceptualize and define the nature of language learning procrastination (hereinafter, LLP). Through identifying various factors affecting LLP, the results of the present study can pave the way to the scrutinized elucidation of the nature of procrastination in a language learning setting and to understand when and why it occurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *procrastination*, like many other language-related concepts sketching to scientific study, influences lots of human activities and behaviors, and its definitions tend to be almost as plentiful as people are researching this topic (Ferrari, Johnson, & McCown, 1995). They believe that procrastination leads to individuals' subjective discomfort. It means that procrastinating does not necessarily imply suffering in all cases. Ferrari (2010) defines procrastination as a voluntary delay of a person's planned action toward some task despite its predictable negative results and a potential overall worse outcome. Diaz-Morales and Ferrari (2015) argue that the procrastinators' delays are needless. However, the criterion of *needlessness* seems to be inadequate, because not all late performance of the tasks must be called procrastination.

Whilst the term procrastination has the same component, delaying, the various definitions are not consistent and cohesive. These different opinions manifested in various definitions, are summarized and then reviewed, followed by integration and extension of this work. For the literal definitions mentioned above, the literature review provides multiple ways to conceptualize procrastination variously by the researchers, while there is no consensus on a single definition. In this regard, Schouwenburg

(2004) proposed another perspective on the issue of defining procrastination, considering it as a behavior in which an individual just lacks proper time management skills in addition to appropriate study methods. When procrastination is interpreted in this way, as a behavior, the definition indicates a task-specific evasion behavior. Alike this perception, procrastination can be defined as regularly delaying accountabilities or significant choices as a part of a behavioral characteristic. This definition of procrastination as a behavioral phenomenon also applies to academic procrastination in that learners get involved in the behavior by failing to accomplish apportioned tasks or by postponing time spent studying for examinations (Deniz, Tras, & Aydogan, 2009).

In addition to the distinctive definitions compiled within the literature on procrastination, scholars have also determined various types of procrastination. Understanding the nature of procrastination and scrutinizing the concept of learning procrastination would be enhanced by identifying different forms of the issue. Investigating conventional research studies on the issue leads the procrastination to be categorized in a number of forms: (1) *academic* procrastination, which means passing in term papers or preparing for examinations at the last minute (Ziesat, Rosenthal, & White, 1978); (2) *decisional* procrastination, defined as the inability in making decisions on time (Effert & Ferrari, 1989); (3) *neurotic procrastination,* defined as the tendency to postpone major life decisions (Ellis & Knaus, 1979); (4) *compulsive* procrastination, referring to decisional and behavioral procrastination in the same person (Ferrari, 1991); and (5) *life routine procrastination,* which means experienced difficulty in scheduling when to do recurring chores and routines on schedule (Milgram, Sroloff, & Rosenbaum, 1988). Among them, academic procrastination, which means the irrational and deliberate delay to complete timely academic tasks (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007), is a prevalent phenomenon experienced by students in most educational settings.

To explore the causes and antecedents of procrastination, some studies

have been conducted. For example, Klingsieck, Grund, Schmid, Fries (2013) explored antecedents of procrastination by interviewing 29 students, the majority of whom were majoring in educational sciences, biology, and computer sciences in a German university. They found a lack of motivation, volitional control, social relatedness, and task competence as the antecedents of academic procrastination.

In another study, Meier, Reinecke, and Meltzer (2016), focused on the effect of engaging in social media on academic procrastination. They recruited 699 students who were Facebook users. Results indicated that low trait self-control, habitual Facebook checking, and high enjoyment of Facebook use predicted almost 40 percent of the variance of using Facebook for procrastination.

Likewise, He (2017) studied the reasons for procrastination of 201 students of different ages, educational levels, and country backgrounds at the University of Bristol. This researcher collected the data using a Likert-scale questionnaire and found laziness, lack of motivation, stress, too much time internet use, and difficulty of the task as the major identified reasons for academic procrastination.

Although procrastination is a prevailing issue in different levels and stages of language learning, the studies devoted to the investigation of procrastination in the realm of language learning processes are rare in the literature. This dearth of research as well as the lack of knowledge concerning the reasons for the language learners' intentional delays was the incentive for the researchers to conduct the present study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The reasons for LLP, in the form of preventing or fostering factors that impede or facilitate effective language learning and performance can be distinguished and verified by the present study. Perceiving and classifying these factors could make understanding the experience of uncomfortable language learners smoother and even devise sophisticated ways to help

them. Hence, the goal of the present study was to establish the conceptual nature of LLP. This step involves constructing a grounded theory-based investigation of LLP through integrating general descriptions of procrastination into a single coherent definition and accommodating them into the field of foreign language learning based on the data collected in semi-structured interviews.

METHOD

The collected data for the present study were analyzed qualitatively. The researchers applied the classical grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the most attractive feature of which is its validity for recognizing new ideas (Charmaz, 2014). Since there was a lack of theory specified to procrastination in the realm of language learning, the grounded theory approach was implemented in the present study as the method of data collection and analysis due to its potentials in helping the researchers to extract theory out of the data (Bryant, 2002). Thus, focusing on conceptualization and generation of a theoretical explanation for the data, this study attempted to inquire the language learners' procrastination profile as a data pool for developing a theoretical model of LLP.

Participants

Although according to Steel (2007), procrastination is prevalent among as high as 95% of individuals, some people may stand out of the procrastinating community. Therefore, the participants of the study were selected through a 'purposeful sampling' design (Creswell, 2012). The criterion considered for the selection of the participants was experiencing procrastination in different stages and processes of their language learning which was controlled by their self-expression. Furthermore, consistent with maximum variation sampling (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014), to maximize differences on specified characteristics and recruit participants who could create as many differences as possible, the researchers did not

apply any control over their gender, age, level of proficiency, years of studying English, and cultural and family backgrounds. Informed consent of the participants was taken at the start of the interview and the confidentiality of the utterances was emphasized.

Theoretical sampling was the guiding principle for recruiting the participants. It means that the researchers continued the data collection and analysis to the point that they encountered less new information for generating grounded theory (Hadley, 2017). In other words, the data were collected and analyzed until all of the data were set under the identified categories and theoretical saturation was achieved.

Accordingly, 43 EFL learners (24 females and 19 males) in Tabriz, Iran, took part in the present study through a public invitation in social media (e.g., telegram channels and groups). The participants were learning English in language institutes (n = 16) or universities (n = 27) and were in intermediate (n = 14) or advanced (n = 29) levels of English proficiency as they mentioned. From 27 participants who were learning English in universities, 16 students did not have any experience of going to language institutes. As the study was conducted in East Azarbayjan Province, Iran, all the participants were bilingual: their mother tongue was Azeri-Turkish whereas their formal language was Farsi. The age range of the participants was 26 to 47 and all of them had at least five years of experience in learning English.

Instruments

The main data collection instruments for developing grounded theories are interviews (Birks & Mills, 2015). The interviewer asked three general questions from the participants. These questions were about (a) the characteristics of a procrastinator in their point of view (to ensure they are real procrastinators), (b) the major areas related to language learning that they procrastinate, and (c) the reasons which lead to their procrastination in language learning. Moreover, on the basis of the respondents' answers,

more complementary questions were asked to clarify any ambiguous utterance and achieve theoretical saturation. As proposed by Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), to collect all necessary data, the researchers modified the interview questions several times in the back and forth movement between data collection and analysis (i.e., Constant Comparative Method) and asked complementary questions. For example, while asking the reasons for procrastination of the last interviewees, the focus was on the language tasks (i.e., their procrastination-raising features) since the data in this area were not already saturated. All the interviews were recorded in the present study since Birks and Mills (2015) suggest that novice grounded theory researchers have a full record of the interview in order not to worry about missing the data and focus their attention on the actual interview.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researchers started the data collection procedure by the purposeful sampling of the participants. For a period of four months, they conducted the interviews and concurrently analyzed and coded the data.

As the first question of the interview, the researchers asked about the participants' previous experience of procrastination in their language learning process to ensure that they are qualified or in Maxwell's (1996) words, "gain entry" (p. 66) the study. Having ensured that each participant has already experienced procrastination in his/her language learning background, the researcher mentioned the purpose and scope of the study and discussed the informed consent with stress on confidentiality of their responses.

All interviews were performed face-to-face during which the interviewers attempted to elicit the participants' ideas regarding the causes of their procrastination in accomplishing language-related tasks. Although the researchers analyzed the data simultaneously during the interview, the collected data were transcribed to be meticulously analyzed after each interview. The transcription of the conversations into a Microsoft Word

file helped the researchers to have an in-depth analysis of them by immersing themselves in the data and covering the possible shortcomings in the succeeding interviews. In the grounded theory method, the data are used to generate concepts. Therefore, the questions in the interviews were directed toward the construction of new concepts and validation of previously emerged concepts (Glaser, 1998).

Having transcribed all the interviews, the researchers broke the transcripts into open codes sentences-by-sentence. Open coding refers to splitting gathered data into codes to compare incidents and extract corresponding concepts. In order to naturally obtain initial concepts, researchers should keep an open attitude toward study and abandon the preconceived notions in this process (Glaser, 1992). During the open coding stage, the researchers used *in vivo codes* (i.e., codes directly taken from the participants' utterances). Of course, these in vivo codes were modified, improved, and acknowledged as soon as the concepts began to emerge and the most appropriate concepts were selected. When the researchers noticed emerging of no new open codes, they moved to the next stage of data analysis called selective coding.

Then, during the selective coding stage, through applying the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researchers carefully analyzed the data and compared each piece of data with all other collected data. By ongoing comparison of codes with incidents and codes with codes (Urquhart, 2013), the categories and their subcategories appeared and were revised as new data were gathered and added. This was obtained by grouping data that referred to the same concept, and by moving data around to ensure their 'fit' with a specific grouping. In line with Charmaz's (2014) idea regarding the fluidity of the categorization process, the researchers merged or broke apart the previously emerged categories as needed as the analysis proceeded.

Through theoretical coding, as the third stage of coding, the connections and relationships between concepts and categories as well as different categories were investigated. Glaser (1978, 2001) contends that it

is during theoretical coding that the theory emerges.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the researchers applied member check and external audit techniques proposed by Creswell (2012). At the first stage, the coding procedures and their interpretations have been consulted with the participants that led to the acknowledgment of all emerged major and subcategories. However, the comments given by two participants led to the bifurcation of the concept of 'anxiety and 'stress' which have initially been conceptualized as the single concept of 'anxiety. Then, the researchers discussed the findings with two external experts (i.e., one in psycholinguistics and the other in grounded theory methodology and qualitative data analysis) and received their critical comments.

Design of the Study

When the goal of a study is theory building, as Birks and Mills (2015) claim, the grounded theory method is popular and this is much relevant when there is a lack of research in the field (Glaser, 2007). Nowadays, this method is popular in the realm of language learning and teaching and various studies have been conducted using grounded theory (e.g., Adel, Egtesadi, & Sadeghi, 2019; Ghadyani, Tahririan, & Afzali, 2020). The grounded theory method was considered appropriate for conducting the present study since it aimed at creating a theoretical model of the causes of LLP which is rare in the literature. Moreover, from among the different schools of grounded theory, the researchers decided to follow the Glaserian classical grounded theory method as it follows the original methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) allowing the data to take the researchers to where they want to go. Accordingly, they took a chain of procedures shaped by back and forth movements between inputs and outputs. While the inputs included collecting, coding, and analyzing the data, the outputs referred to categorizing, sorting, and writing the theory.

RESULTS

During the analysis of the interview data, a total of 814 open codes emerged. These open codes then shaped 197 selective codes through the constant comparison process which formed the abstract concepts. Continuing the constant comparison process, as proposed by Bryant and Charmaz (2007), abstract concepts, subcategories, and categories emerged. As the concepts began to merge and gave birth to categories, the names of concepts were digested by highly abstracted categories. Moreover, the core category emerged.

The Core Category

As a pattern camouflaged within the collected data, the core category emerges in the process of constant coding, comparison, analysis, and theoretical sampling and is the major concentration of the study. Investigating the main concern of the participants, the grounded theory attempts to find out how they resolve this concern (Glaser, 1998). Glaser (1998) contends that without a core category, the researcher has to present much descriptive material without having anywhere to focus.

Delving into language learners' procrastination in different stages of their learning led to the emergence of Dilatory Behavior (DB) as the core category of the grounded theory. DBs were frequent enough to influence different dimensions of the language learners' lives. Interviewees believed that it may occur in different areas related to learning foreign languages. For example, one of the interviewees highlighted his delay in doing exercises for the forthcoming session of his language class.

A set of respondents also stated that they put off their preparation for the exam and submitting projects to the last night before the final exam. The following transcript snippet presents the opinion of one of the interviewees in this regard:

I commonly think I'll read it tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow, and finding

such excuses continues to even 2-4 hours before the exam. (Int#33)

Another situation in which language learners put off their duties is starting up speaking in language classes. Most language learners imagine that speaking in English often corresponds to the feeling of uncertainty, criticism, potential humiliation, and a set of other negative emotions.

Moreover, some of the respondents pointed to their deliberate delays in learning correct spelling. The expansion of the use of word processors equipped with spell-checkers may be one of the reasons which may lead to learners' self-conviction of assigning lower priority to acquisition of spelling accuracy. One participant stated:

Learning spelling may be necessary for progress in other language skills. But for now, I think there are more other things to learn. (Int#14)

Figure 1 displays the core category and its ingredients (i.e., situations in which EFL learners mostly procrastinate).
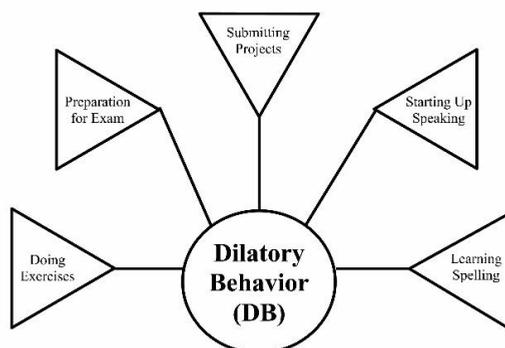

Figure 1: The core category

The emerged core category (Figure 1), called DB, is central to other categories since all of them are indicators of processes affecting or being affected by LLP. DB took a longer time to be saturated in comparison to the other categories as a feature proposed by Glaser (1978) for distinguishing core categories. Moreover, while DB explained why LLP

happened, it was also part of LLP. According to Glaser, "while accounting for variation in the problematic behavior, a core category is also a dimension of the problem. Thus, in part, it explains itself and its own variation" (p. 96).

The Major Categories

During the second phase of coding (i.e., selective coding), three major categories emerged as the reasons for EFL learners' DB. These were learners' characteristics, environmental conditions, and task features.

Learners' Characteristics

Through the iterative process of constant comparison, four types of affective, cognitive, behavioral, and demographic characteristics were set under the major category of Learners' Characteristics and the related open and selective codes were absorbed into those subcategories.

Affective Characteristics: involved concepts of 'motivation', 'anxiety', 'stress', and 'depression' as the affective causes of DB emerged from the data. Language learners consider motivation an important factor in performing language tasks and even in the whole language learning phenomenon.

   Stress and anxiety were the other two apparently similar but basically different issues that emerged as main contributors to DB. Stress can result in more DB as a way to bring back a positive mood, providing support for the concept that DB is connected to the superiority of short-term mood restoration over long-term objective chasing. On the other hand, anxiety, with more lasting effects than stress, was mentioned to be the result of perfectionism and the cause of DB.

   The last concept emerging as the cause of DB and categorized under affective characteristics was depression. Depression here is defined as a retraction from normal psychological performance. This is construed from

Hirschfeld et al.'s (2000) definition of depression as an individual's ability to perform and fulfill normal social roles. Some of the respondents believed that when they fall into depression, they hardly can plan a succession of behavior. Depression undermines the self-regulation of language learners and also affects their practical reasoning in a negative direction. In other words, increased depression leads to increased self-focus (Bernard, Baddeley, Rodriguez, & Burke, 2015) and prevents learners from attention to social interactions. The mental condition following depression can result in DB when doing tasks such as oral performance in language classes or submitting projects on unknown topics.

Cognitive Characteristics: are defined as language learners' conscious decisions to delay the accomplishment of a task, were reported to have some roles in their DB. This subcategory covered four concepts of 'perfectionism', 'self-confidence', 'mindfulness', and 'impulsivity'. Perfectionism was conceptualized as the language learners' self-oriented tendency, as proposed by Flett, Hewitt, and Martin (1995), toward the flawless performance of their responsibilities. Perfectionists put off their performance as far as they can reach a satisfactory level of self-confidence. In addition, lack of self-confidence itself was mentioned as another cognitive source of DB. In this sense, procrastination is resorted to as a tranquilizer of the ambiguities in language and language-related issues.

Mindfulness, as the third concept under cognitive characteristics, was mentioned as a source of DB. Of course, the respondents believed that mindfulness, defined as "a state of *psychological freedom* that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, *without attachment* to any particular point of view" (Martin, 1997, p. 291), reversely affects their procrastination in language learning.

The last concept in this subcategory was the impulsivity of language learners. Regarding the role of impulsivity in DB, the participants had some contradictory claims. From 13 respondents who pointed out impulsivity as a source of DB, seven believed that higher impulsivity leads

to more intensive DB whereas others had an opposite idea. This controversy inspired the researchers to ask a complementary question regarding the reason for their ideas. Reflecting on those utterances, it was concluded that the controversy may arise from their different interpretation of the concept of impulsivity. One of them defined impulsiveness as doing the duty immediately after its assignment whereas the latter considered it as performing what he/she is supposed to do instantly after making his/her decision.

Behavioral Characteristics: were conceptualized as the language learners' behavior in language classes as well as in all other circumstances which are in some way related to language learning and absorbed three concepts of 'indolence', 'attention deficiency', and 'pressure preference'. One of the respondents told that procrastination is not equivalent to indolence but indolence is just a reason for DB among others. In response to the question "What do you mean by indolence?" he answered, "I mean I put off doing exercises even when I have the ability to do them" (Int#34). The open codes referring to respondents' sense of inactivity and avoidance were set under the concept of indolence.

The other concept in this subcategory was attention deficiency. Those who considered attention deficiency as a reason for DB generally believed that when learners are confused by outside stimuli or internal thoughts, it can be difficult for them not only to fulfill the expectations but also to move it to the start line.

The last concept emerging under the behavioral characteristics subcategory was pressure preference. Several interviewees believed that they can work better when they approach the end of the deadline.

Demographic Characteristics: include the concepts of 'age', 'level of proficiency', 'years of experience', and 'gender'. Several participants in the interviews pointed to the role of age and gender in DB. Almost all of those who were of the idea that age is effective in DB believed that they

delay more as they get older. One of the participants said that

As I got older, I lost my incentives, and learning English became a habit for me. It is like going along a routine process with no novelty and this made me a professional delayer. (Int#17)

However, as an exceptional case in the study, one participant asserted that as his age increased, he got more aware of the advantages of language learning and this led to a reduction of his delays. Similar to aging, most of the respondents considered level of proficiency and years of experience as factors affecting DB. They believed that when their level of proficiency and years of experience increased, they fell more into the trap of DB. This may also be justifiable as proficiency level and experience of language learners increase by their aging. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of those who believed that language learners' gender is important in DB were unanimous that males commit procrastination more than female language learners.

Environmental Conditions

The second major category of the causes of DB was called Environmental Conditions which covered socio-cultural and contextual subcategories.

Socio-cultural Factors: this subcategory referred to the concepts of uncertainty avoidance, social media, and role models. The term 'uncertainty avoidance' was adopted from Hofstede (2001) who defined it as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (p. 161). Some of the respondents described that their delays in language learning and doing related tasks, especially starting up speaking in language classes, are the result of their uncertainty regarding their appropriate times.

Another concept emerging from the data under the socio-cultural subcategory was social media. Nowadays, the multiplicity of social media

has turned to a cause of procrastination in everyday life and language learning is not an exception since language learners spend lots of time on electronic media:

It's hard to study your language books when you have a cellphone in front of you, with a lot of social media such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram in it. Studying is the most boring thing in that situation. (Int#29)

The existence of the role models for language learners was the third concept placed under the socio-cultural subcategory. For instance, one interviewee stated, "My brother does his homework in the last moments. We study together and I think his procrastination has been transmitted to me. I didn't use to be delayer but now I am". (Int#42)

Being in contact with friends and family members who are in putting off the starting or accomplishment of different tasks may turn them into a model for language learners.

Contextual Factors: As the second subcategory of Environmental Conditions, contextual factors included the concepts of teacher characteristics, study distractors, institute expectation, peer pressure, and parenting style. Regarding the role of teachers in DB, one participant gave two contradictory ideas:

When the teacher controls me by motivating me to do a specific type of task, I put off others whereas when directs me toward autonomous performance, I defeat procrastination and do the responsibilities immediately. (Int#41)

Distractor was the concept given to anything that can hinder EFL learners from the tasks that must be accomplished. One respondent contended that a messy desk in the study, for instance, can easily become a distractor for her and lead to DB. Another respondent asserted that an outdoor view may also cause delay especially when there is a large amount of motion in the

view. Similar contradictory opinions emerged regarding institute expectation, peer pressure, and parenting style. These are in conformity with principles of Self-Determination Theory, according to which, teachers' control over the learners' performance is the dark side of motivation (Haerens, Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Van Petegem, 2015), and their supportive behavior to promote the learners' autonomy is its bright side (Lou, Chaffee, Lascano, Dincer, & Noels, 2017).

Task Features

Features of the language tasks were the last major category of the reasons of DB which covered task importance, task attractiveness, and task difficulty subcategories.

Task Importance: absorbed the concepts of contribution to scoring and dependency. Some participants stated that tasks with heavier weights in their overall score can be less procrastinated. When learners perceive the important role of a certain task and are aware of its effect on their final scores, they give priority to it and avoid DB. Also, when a task is considered a prerequisite for another task, the likelihood of putting it off is reduced. One of the respondents said that:

When I am supposed to have a lecture in the class, I don't hesitate to collect the necessary information and to practice the lecture. Otherwise, I may put collecting information off to the end of the deadline. (Int#16)

Task Attractiveness: was the subcategory title given to the concepts of 'involvement' and 'interestingness'. This was made since in the interviewees' opinion, the degree to which a task may be attractive for EFL learners is reversely connected with their DB. The concept of involvement in this study refers to peaking EFL learners' participation in performing a language task. For example, discussions and debates can increase EFL learners' involvement and increased involvement leads to reduction of DB.

The second concept, interestingness, convey that language tasks with higher levels of stimulation may produce lower DB. The respondents believed that reasons such as task boringness and irrelevance may make the tasks uninteresting and accordingly result in delays in performing them. They added that the more language tasks can be connected to EFL learners' long-term goals and values, the more they can be made personally interesting and engaging for them.

Task Difficulty: was the third subcategory under the major category of Task Features which included the concepts of 'required knowledge' and 'vagueness'. According to Abdollahzadeh (2010), several factors (e.g., the required vocabulary, genre, language skills, topic familiarity, and conversation strategies) are effective on the difficulty of a language task. On the interviewees' idea, the extent to which a task demands various activities and skills can change the difficulty of the task. Thus, the more are the requirements of a specific task, the higher EFL learners' DB. The concept of required knowledge implies that when EFL learners lack the necessary knowledge needed for performing a specific task, they hinder its performance, and in this way their DB increases.

In the opinion of the research participants, vagueness, as the second concept emerging under the task difficulty subcategory, can have various reasons; inadequate instructions on how EFL learners should complete the task and lack of clear information on practical implications of the task can confuse the learners. This confusion may be a source of DB. The tasks should be clear, yet challenging, in terms of information demand. Figure 2 displays an overview of the LLP theory including its underlying concepts, subcategories, and major categories which emerged during the present study.
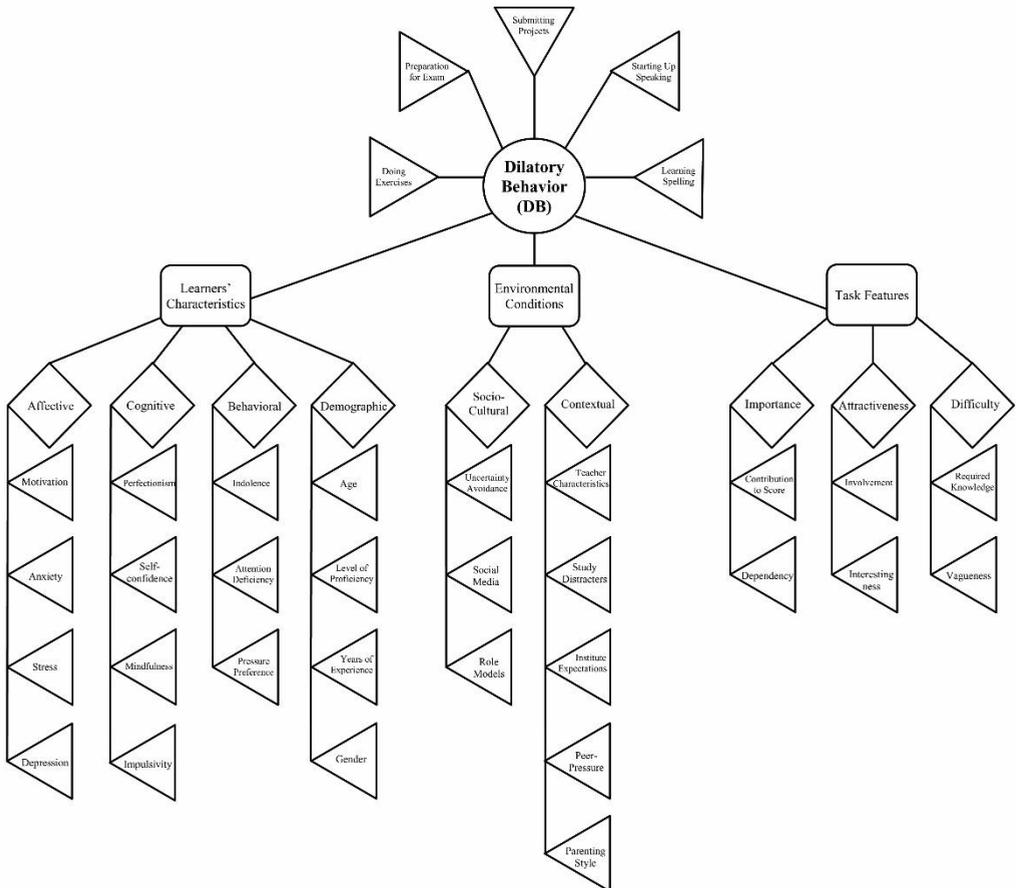
Figure 2: Overview of core and major categories, related subcategories, and concepts in LLP theory

Grounded Theory of LLP

According to Glaser (2001), the outcome of a research study through the grounded theory method is a theory that can explain real-world actions. This theory would be expressed based on the relationships between concepts and categories. In the present study, LLP was developed through the integration of three major categories and the constituent sub-categories and concepts discussed in the previous section. The core category called

DB was identified to explain the areas in which language learners mostly procrastinate and was contextualized based on learners' characteristics, environmental conditions, and task features. Thus, it can be hypothesized that controlling the affective, cognitive, behavioral characteristics of learners, providing satisfactory environmental conditions, and devising appropriate tasks types to their demographic conditions can contribute to the reduction of EFL learners' LLP.

DISCUSSION

The main concern of the present study was to investigate procrastination as a widespread phenomenon in language learning. Concerning the situations in which EFL learners mostly procrastinate, they pointed to doing exercises, preparation for an exam, submitting projects, starting up speaking, and learning to spell. These were missing in the previous literature since no study has already focused on LLP. All the mentioned situations include activities that require learners' conscious attention to what they are going to do. Of course, this is correct for some of the situations only in the preliminary levels of learning (e.g., starting up speaking and learning to spell). This supports the claim made by Barkley (1997) who believes that the individuals who suffer from attention deficits are inclined to be easily sidetracked and start a new task (which may entirely be unrelated to language learning) while the language-related task is not yet completed. This would lead to procrastination in language-related tasks.

Regarding causes, the participants stated numerous reasons for their own DBs. Some of the contributors have already been documented fully or partially in previous literature on academic procrastination. For instance, Seo (2008) found the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination, and Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani (2008) associated the lower level of self-esteem with academic procrastination. In another study, Hollender (1965) referred to the nature of the task as a

significant element in understanding standards and relevant issues like procrastination. The role of social media in students' procrastination has already been highlighted by Meier et al. (2016). This finding was also supported in the present study. The results of the present study were also consistent with the study by He (2017), in which lack of motivation, laziness (i.e., indolence), internet surfing (i.e., social media), and task difficulty were found as contributors to students' procrastination. Moving beyond the previous research, the analysis of the participants' responses led to the emergence of newer categories and concepts within the LLP theory. The roles of factors such as demographic characteristics of learners, newer versions of social media (i.e., Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram), and some aspects of contextual conditions and task features had gone unnoticed in the previous studies, not only in the realm of LLP but also in the broader area of academic procrastination.

The role anxiety and stress play in EFL learners' DB is consistent with the results of the study by Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister (2001) which indicated that a negative mood induction can lead to more time spent as procrastination in performing tasks.

An important and somehow strange finding in the present study was the participants' preferences to work under pressure. Some EFL learners consider working under the pressure of tight deadlines as a positive challenge for themselves that leads to better results. This is consistent with the findings of the study by Freedman and Edwards (as cited in Choi & Moran, 2009) who revealed that such challenges do not necessarily produce negative outcomes in people. However, a number of researchers (e.g., Neenan, 2008; Simpson & Pychyl, 2009) argue that such reasons are just a matter of rationalization to legitimatize their DB.

The significance of role models in the DBs of EFL learners was also another finding of the present study. This is in line with the findings of the study by Gilman, Curran, Calderon, Stoeckel, and Evins (2014) which has provided initial evidence of the effect of social observation on the pattern of intertemporal choices. It means that the available models for humans

can change their behavior after a while.

However, the results were in contradiction with the findings of the previous studies in some of the dimensions. Considering perfectionism, as an example, the results indicated that higher self-oriented perfectionism led to higher levels of LLP by EFL learners to achieve their intended level of performance which was in contrast to the results of the study by Flett et al. (1995) which indicated a negative association between procrastination and self-oriented perfectionism. The latter finding also indicates that LLP does not always occur due to the learners' inattentiveness and the individuals may commit LLP for some positive reasons.

It is worthy of note that because the participants of the study were EFL learners, only the learners' perspectives have been highlighted. However, teachers and other entities who are involved in the process of language teaching in one way or another can help EFL learners vanquish their destructive delays and even legalize LLP with constructive purposes to maximize their learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The grounded theory of LLP constructed in the present study highlights the lived experiences of EFL learners who are concerned about their DB and indicates that they think over various reasons for their LLP stemming from their own characteristics, the learning context, and their responsibilities in performing the intended language tasks.

Most of the previous procrastination treatments have been based on self-development strategies (Schouwenburg, Lay, Pychyl, & Ferrari, 2004) targeting learners' characteristics such as lack of time management (Hafner, Oberst, & Stock, 2014). Nevertheless, our findings through revealing the role of environmental conditions and task features indicated that factors beyond EFL learners' personal characteristics should be taken into account when planning interventions for negative sides of LLP and there is an essential need for devising a package of strategies focusing on

different causes associated with their DB to overcome LLP.

The findings of the present study can raise the awareness of language teachers regarding the causes of LLP. Such awareness can be implemented in predicting the consequences it may have on EFL learners' performances. Depending on the causes of LLP, appropriate treatment strategies can be taken to reduce its negative effects on language learners' achievement and psychological conditions. The results may provide cues of great worth for language teachers, policymakers, syllabus designers, and material developers to prevent undue time loss by the language learners. When developing educational programs, they should keep the factors in mind, devise adequate contrivances such as setting fixed deadlines, take more realistic principles and avoid task characteristics that raise LLP. The learners can also be guided to study in less distracting places.

However, as the source of data for this study was the participants' verbal reports, and due to the exploratory nature of the study, the results may be imperfect and they may not be further generalized (Stake, 2010). The study just constructed a theory of LLP which needs to be tested and validated by future quantitative studies. Hence, by taking an exploratory sequential mixed method design, including a qualitative study followed by a quantitative phase built on the results of the initial phase (Creswell, 2014), an LLP scale can be developed to investigate the causes of LLP. The findings of the present study can serve as the qualitative phase of such a design. Moreover, future studies may explore the consequences of LLP in the learning processes of language learners and even propose some solutions for its negative aspects.

It has also to be taken into account that the participants in the present study were EFL learners in Tabriz, East Azarbayjan Province, Iran whereas the conditions and structures may be different in other areas both inside the country and abroad. Accordingly, future research should examine the applicability of the results to other contexts and even broaden these findings to cover more EFL learners in such contexts. Having ensured the validity and generalizability of the results of the LLP scale, EFL teachers

can implement it to diagnose their students' dilatory behavior and offer appropriate interventions, as proposed by Schouwenburg et al. (2004) to reduce its probable negative consequences.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Saber Khooei-Oskooei   iD   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6810-4370
Saeideh Ahangari   iD   http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6739-3724
Zohreh Seifoori   iD   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4296-8226

References

Abdollahzadeh, E. (2010). Applicability issues with TBLT in EFL contexts. *Journal of Applied Language Studies (JALS), 1*(1), 28-49.

Adel, S. M. R., Egtesadi, A., & Sadeghi, F. (2019). Construction and validation of a critical pedagogy questionnaire to assess ELT teachers: A mixed-method study. *Issues in Language Teaching, 8*(1), 333-375.

Afzal, S., & Jami, H. (2018). Prevalence of academic procrastination and reasons for academic procrastination in university students. *Journal of Behavioural Sciences, 28*(1), 51-69.

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Walker, D. A. (2014). *Introduction to research in education* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Balkis, M., Duru, E., & Duru, S. (2009). Prevalence of academic procrastination behavior among preservice teachers, and its relationship with demographics and individual preferences. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education, 5*, 18-32.

Barkley, R. A. (1997). Behavioral inhibition, sustained inattention, and executive functioning: Constructing a unifying theory of ADHD. *Psychological Bulletin, 121*, 65-94.

Bernard, J. D., Baddeley, J. L., Rodriguez, B. F., & Burke, P. A. (2015).

Depression, language, and affect: An examination of the influence of baseline depression and affect induction on language. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 35*(3), 317-326.

Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2015). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Bryant, A. (2002). Re-grounding grounded theory. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application, 4*(1), 25-42.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2007). Grounded theory in historical perspective: An epistemological account. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 31-57). London: Sage.

Burka, J. B., & Yuen, L. M. (2008). *Procrastination: Why you do it, what to do about it now* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Perseus Books.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd ed., pp. 347-365). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Choi, J., & Moran, S. V. (2009). Why not procrastinate? Development and validation of a new active procrastination scale. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 149*(2), 195-211.

Constantin, K., English, M. M., & Mazmanian, D. (2018). Anxiety, depression, and procrastination among students: Rumination plays a larger mediating role than worry. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 36*, 15-27.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Deniz, M. D., Tras, Z., & Aydogan, D. (2009). An investigation of academic procrastination, locus of control, and emotional intelligence. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 9*(2), 623-632.

Diaz-Morales, J. F., & Ferrari, J. R. (2015). More time to procrastinators: The role of time perspective. In M. Stolarski, N. Fieulaine, & W. van Beek (Eds.), *Time perspective theory; review, research and application: Essays in honor*

of Philip G. Zimbardo (pp. 305-321). New York, NY: Springer.

Effert, B. R., & Ferrari, J. R. (1989). Decisional procrastination: Examining personality correlates. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 4(*1), 151-156.

Ellis, A., & Knaus, W. J. (1979). *Overcoming procrastination: Or, how to think and act rationally in spite of life's inevitable hassles*. New York, NY: New American Library.

Ferrari, J. R. (1991). Self-handicapping by procrastinators: Protecting self-esteem, social-esteem, or both? *Journal of Research in Personality, 25*, 245-261.

Ferrari, J. R. (2010). *Still procrastinating: The no regrets guide to getting it done*. Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Ferrari, J. R., Johnson, J. L., & McCown, W. G. (1995). *Procrastination and task avoidance: Theory, research and treatment*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Flett, G. L., Hewitt, P. L., & Martin, T. R. (1995). Dimensions of perfectionism and procrastination. In J. R. Ferrari, J. L. Johnson, & W. G. McCown (Eds.), *Procrastination and task avoidance: Theory, research, and treatment* (pp. 113-136). New York, NY: Plenum.

Ghadyani, F., Tahririan, M. H., & Afzali, K. (2020). Conceptualization of hope for EFL teaching within the Iranian context: A grounded theoretical model. *Issues in Language Teaching, 9*(2), 27-58.

Gilman, J. M., Curran, M. T., Calderon, V., Stoeckel, L. E., Evins, A. E. (2014). Impulsive social influence increases impulsive choices on a temporal discounting task in young adults. *PLOS One, 9*(7), 1-8.

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Emergence vs. forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis*: Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussion*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2001). *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2007). Doing formal theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 97-113). London: Sage.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine De Gruyter.

Hadley, G. (2017). *Grounded theory in applied linguistics research: A practical*

guide. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haerens, L., Aelterman, N., Vansteenkiste, M., Soenens, B., & Van Petegem, S. (2015). Do perceived autonomy-supportive and controlling teaching relate to physical education students' motivational experiences through unique pathways? Distinguishing between the bright and the dark side of motivation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 16*, 26-36.

Hafner, A., Oberst, V., & Stock, A. (2014). Avoiding procrastination through time management: An experimental intervention study. *Educational Studies, 40*(3), 352-360.

He, S. (2017). A multivariate investigation into academic procrastination of university students. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 5*, 12-24.

Hirschfeld, R. M., Montgomery, S. A., Keller, M. B., Kasper, S., Schatzberg, A. F., Moller, H. J., … Bourgeois, M. (2000). Social functioning in depression: A review. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 61*, 268-275.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Hollender, M. H. (1965). Perfectionism. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 6*, 94-103.

Kim, K. R., & Seo, E. H. (2015). The relationship between procrastination and academic performance: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Individual Differences, 82*, 26-33.

Klassen, R. M., Krawchuk, L. L., & Rajani, S. (2008). Academic procrastination of undergraduates: Low self-efficacy to self-regulate predicts higher levels of procrastination. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 33*(4), 915-931.

Klingsieck, K. B. (2013). Procrastination: When good things don't come to those who wait. *European Psychologist, 18*, 24-34.

Klingsieck, K. B., Grund, A., Schmid, S., & Fries, S. (2013). Why students procrastinate: A qualitative approach. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(4), 397-412.

Lou, N. M., Chaffee, K. E., Lascano, D. I. V., Dincer, A., & Noels, K. A. (2017). Complementary perspectives on autonomy in self-determination theory and language learner autonomy. *TESOL Quarterly, 52*(1), 210-220.

Martin, J. R. (1997). Mindfulness: A proposed common factor. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 7*, 291-312.

Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Meier, A., Reinecke, L., Meltzer, C., E. (2016). "Facebocrastination"? Predictors of using Facebook for procrastination and its effects on students' well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior, 64*, 65-76.

Milgram, N. A., Sroloff, B., & Rosebaum, M. (1988). The procrastination of everyday life. *Journal of Research in Personality, 22*, 197-212.

Neenan, M. (2008). Tackling procrastination: An REBT perspective for coaches. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, *26*(1), 53-62.

Schouwenburg, H. C. (2004). Procrastination in academic settings: General introduction. In H. C. Schouwenburg, C. H. Lay, T. A. Pychyl, J. R. Ferrari, H. C. Schouwenburg, C. H. Lay, ... J. R. Ferrari (Eds.) , *Counseling the procrastinator in academic settings* (pp. 3-17). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Schouwenburg, H. C., Lay, C. H., Pychyl, T. A., & Ferrari, J. R. (2004). *Counseling the procrastinator in academic settings*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Schraw, G., Wadkins, T., & Olafson, L. (2007). Doing the things we do: A grounded theory of academic procrastination. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(1), 12-25.

Seo, E. H. (2008). Self-efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 36*(6), 753-764.

Simpson, W. K., & Pychyl, T. A. (2009). In search of the arousal procrastinator: Investigating the relation between procrastination, arousal-based personality traits and beliefs about procrastination motivations. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *47*(8), 906-911.

Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Steel, P. (2007). The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(1), 65-94.

Steel, P. (2010). Arousal, avoidant and decisional procrastinators: Do they exist? *Personality and Individual Differences, 48*, 926-934.

Steel, P., & Klingsieck, K. B. (2016). Academic procrastination psychological

antecedents revisited. *Australian Psychologist, 51*, 36-46.

Steel, P., Brothen, T., & Wambach, C. (2001). Procrastination and personality, performance, and mood. *Personality and Individual Differences, 30*(1), 95-106.

Svartdal, F., & Steel, P. (2017). Irrational delay revisited: Examining five procrastination scales in a global sample. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 1-10.

Svartdal, F., Granmo, S., & Færevaag, F. S. (2018). On the behavioral side of procrastination: Exploring behavioral delay in real-life settings. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1-11.

Tice, D. M., Bratslavsky, E., & Baumeister, R. F. (2001). Emotional distress regulation takes precedence over impulse control: If you feel bad, do it! *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*(1), 53-67.

Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

Yurtseven, N., & Akpur, U. (2018). Perfectionism, anxiety and procrastination as predictors of EFL academic achievement: A mixed methods study. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language), 12*(2), 96-115.

Ziesat, H. A., Rosenthal, T. L., & White, G. M. (1978). Behavioral self-control in treating procrastination of studying. *Psychological Reports, 42*(1), 59-69.