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Overcoming Procrastination: English Language Teachers' and Learners' Suggestions

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Abstract

Procrastination pervades the long and taxing process of foreign language learning and working against it is crucial. This study attempted to elicit and investigate the strategies and solutions from English teachers and learners which can help in dealing with procrastination over weekly assignments, term projects, and preparing for exams. To achieve this aim, suggestions were sought from 46 English teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience. Out of a total of 384 suggestions, higher-frequency ones were listed and solutions and strategies in related literature were sifted through to draw up a 21-item Likert-type questionnaire, which sought the reaction of English learners to the teacher-suggested strategies. A revised version was distributed among 97 English learners comprising 65 females and 32 males, whose ages ranged from 17 to 29 years. The English language teachers believed that to help students abandon their procrastination, they should encourage them with extra points for duly completed assignments, check the progress of projects, and give quizzes and exams during the term atop of other strategies. The most frequently endorsed strategies by the English learners included: adjusting the quantity of assignments to learner's ability, selecting attractive and diverse assignments, teacher's proper guidance and providing sample projects to reduce anxiety; and identifying the most important topics and disregarding unnecessary contents.

Key terms: Academic procrastination; anti-procrastination strategies; learners' views; Teachers' views

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1. Introduction

Procrastination, as a multifaceted phenomenon and a complex cognitive-behavioral process, can be defined as "the purposive delay in the beginning and/or completion of an overt or covert act, typically accompanied by subjective discomfort" (Ferrari, 1998, p. 281). In other words, it refers to "the delay of a task or assignment that is under one's control" (Ackerman and Gross, 2005, p.5). This behavior entails putting off starting or finishing a requirement until the final minutes of the due time, or even after the scheduled target date, which may mean not doing the task at all (Dryden, 2000). Wieber and Gollwitzer (2010) suggested that behavior can be considered as procrastination if four conditions are present: commitment to a goal, chance to perform the goal, awareness that postponing the action will make the situation worse, and intention to act later.

Procrastination is present in all areas of a person's life affecting nearly 1 in 4 adults (Ferrari, 1994). It is particularly prevalent in academic settings, as academic procrastination, which may be defined as unreasonable postponement of the completing of the required academic assignments such as "writing term papers, studying for exams, reading assignments, and performing academic administrative and attendance tasks" (Ozer, Demir and Ferrari, 2009, p.241-242). Ellis and Knaus (2002) described academic procrastination as desire in students to refrain from assignments and the

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promise to do it later as well as using strategies to justify this postponement and avoid blame.

According to some studies, about 75% of college students reported that they procrastinated (Potts, 1987) and about 50% of them were persistent procrastinators and suffered the consequences of their habit (Day, Mensink & O'Sullivan, 2000). O'Brien's picture of academic procrastination is grimmer: it occurs in 80-95% of college students (O'Brien, 2002); and, the incidence seems to be still rising (Steel, 2007. Solomon and Rothblum (1984) investigated the procrastination among undergraduate students and found that 46% of students procrastinated on writing term papers, 30.1% procrastinated when reading for weekly tasks, and 27.6% procrastinated while preparing for exams. Ozer (2011) conducted a study in Turkey to identify the prevalence of academic procrastination among students at high school, undergraduate and graduate levels. The results showed that undergraduate students procrastinated more. High school and undergraduate students affirmed that they mostly postponed studying for exams, while graduate students stated that they often procrastinated on preparing and submitting their term papers. A study investigating the relation of the academic procrastination to gender found that males procrastinated more frequently than females (Ozer and Ferrari, 2011).

Padilla-Vargas (2017, pp. 104-105) summarized the consequences of procrastination: high levels of stress, health problems, weak immune system, psychological distress, anxiety and/or depression, low academic

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grades, and poor performance, and losing academic or employment chances. Procrastinators experience greater stress as the time pressure for accomplishing academic tasks increases and they approach the target deadline (Mohammadipour and Rahmati, 2016). Procrastination also decreases the self-efficiency of students, adversely affects their achievement, and can weaken their ability to fulfill course assignments while some students are affected more than others in these areas (Wilkinson & Sherman, 1991). Although procrastination might lead to some advantages, the initial profits are temporary and the anxiety and health problems procrastinators undergo when the deadlines draw close overrides the benefits (Tice and Baumeister, 1997). Procrastinators appear to lack sufficient confidence in their academic endeavor, do not spontaneously engage in activities, lack adequate skill to invest time and effort, easily lose their concentration, and hence are not likely to regulate their learning process (Park, 2008). Not surprisingly, procrastination has been found to have negative academic consequences (Ariely & Wertrnbrich, 2002; Wong, 2008; Kim and Seo, 2015). The poor performance of procrastinators has manifested itself in low quiz and course scores, as well as in their low overall grades (Steel et al. 2001; Kim & Seo, 2015).

Procrastination is a complicated process including behavioral, affective, and cognitive factors (Fee and Tangney, 2000). Identifying and understanding the predictors and correlates of academic procrastination allow teachers to plan strategies to deal with it and remedy its damages

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(Padilla-Vargas, 2017), although it should be acknowledged that one cannot declare with certainty whether something is a cause or a consequence of procrastination. Some of the most important correlates and possible reasons mentioned in the literature are task aversion (e.g., Perry, 2012), lack of self-regulatory skills (e.g., Park and Sperling, 2011), self-handicapping strategies and wrong attributions (e.g., Akca, 2012), lack of self-esteem (e.g., Duru and Balkis, 2017), self-efficacy (e.g., Malkoc & Mutlu, 2018), and motivation (e.g., Saracaloglu and Gokdas, 2016), lack of time management skills (e.g., McCloskey, 2012), perfectionism (e.g., Kagan et al., 2010), fear of failure (e.g., Haghbin, McCaffrey, and Pychyl, 2012), anxiety (e.g., Sirois, 2014), and conscientiousness and neuroticism (e.g., Morris and Fritz, 2015).

A variety of strategies can be utilized singly or in combination matched with individuals' styles. Self-control and cognitive therapies can be effective for students who suffer from test anxiety. Collaborative learning with peers and shorter cutoff points for submitting tasks may also work (Day, Mensink and O'Sullivan, 2000). Self-efficacy enhancement and decreasing sensitivity to distractors by removing temptation cues in the environment are other remedies suggested by Wieber and Gollwitzer (2010). Focusing on process and the means to achieve goals might also ameliorate procrastination especially when fear of failure runs high as concentrating on the process can cancel out the negative effects of students' fear of failure and reinforce their self-efficacy (Krause and Freund, 2014).

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Ackerman and Gross (2005) maintain that students' interest and positive feelings reduce the likelihood of procrastination, while unpleasant feelings about tasks give rise to procrastination. This means that the way an educator clarifies the instructions, provides rewards, task appeal and chances for developing skills, may eliminate some procrastination (Ackerman and Gross, 2005). Another way to help individuals in overcoming procrastination is giving responsibilities to them so that they can play active roles in the process of learning and teaching and realize that their capabilities have not been ignored (Yeşil, 2012).

The findings of a study done by Katz, Eilot and Nevo (2014) suggested that developing more adaptive kinds of motivation in students was a wiser strategy against procrastination. They asserted that "creating a learning environment that supports the development of more adaptive types of motivation, and therefore less procrastination, might be a better way to overcome procrastination than trying to eliminate this behavior after the student has implemented and adopted it" (Katz, Eilot and Nevo, 2014, p.117).

Teng and Kamil (2017) consider time management and prioritizing skills important factors in reducing procrastination because having balance, flexibility, and control over time makes it more efficient for people to carry out their tasks. The association of time management and academic procrastination has been supported by empirical evidence from studies which facilitated participants' time management skills and observed a

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concomitant reduction in their procrastination (Häfner, Oberst, & Stock, 2014; Nordby et al., 2016).

It appears that many studies have investigated academic procrastination and suggested different strategies to reduce it (see also Vij, & Lomash, 2014; Kountz, 1999; Steel, & Klingsieck, 2016). However, strange as it may seem, few studies in applied linguistics and fields associated with language teaching and learning explored the theoretical and practical dimensions of this prevalent phenomenon in relation to their concerns. In fact, a triangulated search, which involved both general Google search and search in specific journals concerned with language teaching gave few results for "procrastination" in the context of language teaching or learning. Specifically speaking, not a single research report or conceptual analysis dealing directly with this issue was found, either in major Iranian applied linguistics journals or the many well-known international language-teaching journals which were searched separately on September 20, 2020. A cursory survey of textbooks targeting language teachers also came to similar conclusion.

Some language teaching researchers have factored in procrastination in their investigation and account of language learners' strategies, traits, motivation and achievement. Without directly referring to procrastination, O'Mally et al. (1985) and Oxford (2011) included a "planning" component in their cognitive strategies for language learning, which was partly about setting schedules and time management. Cohen's and Macaro's (2007) and

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Dornyei's (2009) emphasis on autonomy, goal setting and self-regulation also involved time management and effective scheduling skills.

Some researchers have brought in the notion of procrastination more directly when studying self-regulation. Mizumato and Takeuchi (2012) showed the validity of including a self-reported measure of procrastination to explore the self- regulation of Japanese learners of English as a foreign language. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) examined instances of perfectionism in the reactions of language learners to their oral performance and found that anxious learners procrastinated more and were more concerned about evaluation and errors. The study by Rose and Harbon (2013) also highlighted the challenge for many language learners in controlling procrastination and managing commitments. But the mixed findings in Kormos and Csizer's (2013) study, which showed that time management was not an important determinant of autonomous learning, weakened the strength of this challenge. In their study, time management, as a self-regulatory variable, did not linearly affect language learners' ability to control procrastination and plan their study schedule, because it was significantly moderated by other learner variables.

As one of the few studies reported about procrastination in the context of language learning, Mohammadi, Taheri and Hassaskhah (2015) explored the relationship between procrastination and Internet use of EFL learners during their university years and found a moderate relationship. They also found that freshmen procrastinated more. Bekleyen (2017), who

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frankly pointed out the paucity of studies examining procrastination by language learners, investigated the relationship between Turkish university language learners' procrastination and their gender, age, motivation, and reported that men procrastinated more, those with stronger motivation procrastinated less, but procrastination was not related to age.

As the brief survey of related literature above shows, there has not been much research to study the procrastinating behavior of language learners and the possible strategies they may use to reduce procrastination. Hence, considering the significance of this issue and its consequences, there is a need to do more exploration about strategies specific to language learning, which can help language learners reduce their academic procrastination. In fact, the present study was conducted to respond to this need by probing the thoughts and perceptions of learners and teachers about academic procrastination and eliciting the anti-procrastination solutions and strategies which they believed was effective. The question which guided this process was "What solutions and strategies do language teachers and learners suggest to overcome academic procrastination?"

2. Method

This study used an exploratory mixed-method design. Initially, it elicited qualitative data from open-ended questions posed to language teachers. This data and information from other sources described below were used as a

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basis for developing a Likert-type questionnaire, which, in turn, elicited quantitative data from language learners. This section presents the elements of the method used to elicit and explore the solutions and strategies that language teachers and learners suggested for fighting academic procrastination.

2.1. Participants

English language teachers and learners who were conveniently available to the researchers and willing to participate in the study were targeted for data elicitation. The 46 teachers (35 female and 11 male) who contributed to this study taught in language institutes, schools and universities in Semnan City and had at least three years of language teaching experience. The 97 learners who submitted completed questionnaires related to this research included 65 females and 32 males, aged between 17 and 29 years. They studied either English Language and Literature at Semnan University or general English at institutions in Semnan. Participants studying at Semnan University included freshmen and sophomore, and the participants studying at institutions were studying at intermediate level or above. They enjoyed similar linguistic and cultural background and were all native Persian speakers.

2.2. Instruments

An open-ended questionnaire was prepared to elicit strategies which teachers might suggest to defeat language learner procrastination. It was

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followed by a Likert-type questionnaire to explore the reactions of learners. To ensure the validity of these instruments, the items in each were subjected to close examination by external experts, who were graduate students and/or teachers in applied linguistics. Revisions were applied in response to their feedback whether about the formal aspects or relevance of the items.

2.2.1. English Language Teachers' Solutions to Academic Procrastination

In addition to requesting personal and socio-demographic information of teachers such as age, gender, and length of teaching experience, this instrument included three open-ended questions in Persian, which each asked teachers about the solutions they suggested for students' procrastination regarding weekly assignments, term projects, and preparing for exams. (See *2.3. Procedure* below for the three questions posed to the teachers.)

2.2.2. English Language Learners' Response to Solutions to Academic Procrastination

The researcher developed this 21-items questionnaire incorporating the most frequent strategies the teachers proposed as well as the solutions and ideas found in literature on procrastination. The questionnaire items, which were written in Persian, asked language learners to mark their agreement or disagreement about the suggested strategies on a 5-point Likert scale. For example the item *Encouraging learners to do assignments by giving extra*

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points was followed by five response alternatives: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- no idea, 4- agree, and 5- strongly agree. The respondents were also asked to give personal information, including their age and gender. The items were examined by another applied linguist to ensure their validity and clarity of wording. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.82. (See Appendix for the English translation of the suggested anti-procrastination strategies in preparing weekly assignments, term projects, and for exams; see Table 4 for more detailed Cronbach's alpha results for the questionnaire)

2.3. Procedure

To address the research question "What solutions and strategies do language teachers and learners suggest to overcome academic procrastination?" the researcher first posed three open-ended questions to experienced English teachers to elicit strategies which they proposed. They were asked to write short answers to the following questions:

a) What solutions do you suggest for your students to overcome procrastination in preparing their weekly assignments?
b) What solutions do you suggest for your students to overcome procrastination in preparing their term projects?
c) What solutions do you suggest for your students to overcome procrastination in preparing for exams?

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They were told that repetition was not a problem and similar strategies could be recommended for two, or all the three of the situations. Forty-six teachers returned the questionnaires with answers to either all the three questions, two questions, or only one question. The total number of suggestions was 384. The researchers also culled anti-procrastination strategies and solutions from texts written about the subject.

The more frequent anti-procrastination suggestions of teachers and ideas selected from literature on procrastination were coalesced into a Likert-type questionnaire. This 21-item questionnaire polled learners' agreement about anti-procrastination strategies in three situations: in preparing weekly assignments, in preparing term projects, and in preparing for exams. The participants' responses were entered into SPSS software for analysis.

3. Results

In the exploratory phase of the study, English teachers were asked three open-ended questions about strategies which can help language learners deal with procrastination of tasks at three levels: preparing weekly assignments, completing term projects and preparing for exams. Tables 1-3 present the most frequently occurring suggestions by teachers to pre-empt procrastination by language learners. The cut-off frequency for each type of task was decided arbitrarily. Table 1 shows the five most frequent responses of teachers to the question about preparing weekly assignments.

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Table 1

Teachers' five most frequent suggestions for overcoming procrastination of weekly assignments

Suggested strategies	**Frequency**
1. Encouraging learners to do assignments by giving extra points	32
2. Teachers continuously tracking and checking assignments	17
3. Adjusting the quantity of assignments to the learner's ability	14
4. Selecting attractive and diverse assignments	11
5. Emphasizing the importance of assignments and establishing a positive attitude about it	10

According to Table 1, *allocating bonus points* and *teachers' monitoring* topped the suggested solutions by the teachers for overcoming short-term procrastinations. As can be seen in Table 1, *allocating bonus points* was suggested almost twice as many times as *teachers' monitoring* and the difference between number 4 and number 5 is minimal.

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Table 2 shows teachers' four most frequent solutions concerning the postponement of the completion of term projects.

Table 2

Teachers' four most frequent suggestions for overcoming procrastination in preparing term projects

Suggested strategies	**Frequency**
1. Teachers' continuously checking the progress of the project and learners' reporting the progress	20
2. Allocating points for superior projects	18
3. Providing adequate explanation of how the project can be carried out and clarifying the importance of the project at the beginning of the term	15
4. Devising group projects	14

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As Table 2 shows, teachers' most frequent suggestion for overcoming procrastination in preparing term projects is *Continuous progress check* by the teacher and *progress report* by the learner followed by "Allocating points for superior projects". In contrast with suggestions for weekly assignments, the top suggestion for preventing procrastination of term projects is very close in frequency to the second most frequent suggestion and the difference between the most frequent suggestion and the other suggestions displayed in Table 2 is not as large as their counter-parts in Table 1.

Table 3 reports teachers' four most frequent suggestions for overcoming procrastination in preparing for final exam.

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Table 3

Teachers' four most frequent suggestions for overcoming procrastination in preparing for final exams

Suggested strategies	Frequency
1. Regular quizzes and exams during the term	25
2. Regular class questions	15
3. Practicing and reviewing the contents of exams	15
4. Creating motivation in learners to stabilize their learning during the term	8

As shown in Table 3, the most frequent strategy teachers suggested to prevent exam-preparation procrastination was "regular quizzes and exams" followed by "regular class questions" and "Practicing and reviewing the contents of final exam". Similar to suggestions for weekly assignments, the top suggestion displayed in Table 3 for overcoming procrastination of exam preparation is much more frequent than the rest of suggestions. In fact, it is more than three times as frequent as number 4, while number 2 and number 3 are similar in frequency.

The most frequent suggestions of teachers and some solutions and strategies culled from related literature were compiled as a Likert-type questionnaire targeting procrastination in the three spheres of academic

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tasks. To inspect the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach alpha analysis was applied to the three groups of the items. Table 4 summarizes the information obtained from Cronbach alpha analyses.

Table 4

Cronbach alpha indexes for *anti-procrastination items rated by English language learners*

Scale	Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach values
	Assignments	6	.63
Likert Anti-procrastination strategies	Projects	8	.71
	Exams	7	.61
	Total	21	.82

As can be seen, the questionnaire enjoyed acceptable reliability indexes as a whole (.82) as well as for its subscales.

Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of learners' answers to the six items in the first subscale (*suggested strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing weekly assignment*) of the questionnaire. (See Appendix for the gist of the questionnaire items in the same order as in Tables 5, 6, and 7 below)

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Table 5

Frequencies of learners' opinion about strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing weekly assignment

Choices Strategies	**SD**		**D**		**SD+D Sum**	**N**		**A**		**SA**		**A+SA Sum**
	F	%	F	%	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	%
Item 1	2	2.1	14	14.4	16	21	21.6	31	32	29	29.9	60
Item 2	16	16.5	32	33	48	25	25.8	19	19.6	5	5.2	24
Item 3	1	1	2	2.1	3	14	14.4	39	39.2	42	42.3	81
Item 4	1	1	3	3.1	4	13	13.4	40	41.2	40	41.2	80
Item 5	8	8.2	10	10.3	18	29	29.9	36	37.1	14	14.4	50
Item 6	5	5.2	9	9.3	14	31	32	21	21.6	31	32	53

SD: strongly disagree D: disagree N: no idea A: agree

SA: strongly agree

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Of the six items, item 3, “adjusting the quantity of assignments to learners’ ability” obtained the highest agreement percentage (81%), followed by item 4, “Selecting attractive and diverse assignments” (80%). Item 2, “Teacher continuously tracking and checking assignments” had the lowest percentage for agreement responses (24%).

Table 6 shows the frequencies and percentages of the responses to eight items in the second subscale (*suggested strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing term projects*).

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Table 6

Frequencies of learners' opinion about strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing term projects

Strategies	**SD**		**D**		**SD+D Sum**	**N**		**A**		**SA**		**A+SA Sum**
	F	%	F	%	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	%
Item 7	7	7.2	19	19.6	26	23	23.7	36	37.1	12	12.4	48
Item 8	2	2.1	19	19.6	21	10	10.3	39	40.2	27	27.8	66
Item 9	4	4.1	6	6.2	10	19	19.6	41	42.3	27	27.8	68
Item 10	9	9.3	10	10.3	19	29	29.9	26	26.8	23	23.7	49
Item 11	2	2.1	7	7.2	9	15	15.5	50	51.5	23	23.7	73
Item 12	3	3.1	5	5.2	8	15	15.5	48	49.5	26	26.8	74
Item 13	1	1	2	2.1	3	31	32	47	48.5	16	16.5	63
Item 14	0	0	1	1	1	13	13.4	48	49.5	35	36.1	83

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As Table 6 indicates, the majority of the students either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the majority of this set of strategies. Of the eight items, item 14, "Teacher's proper guidance and providing samples similar to the project to reduce anxiety in learner" had the highest percentage of agreement responses (83%) while item 7, "Teacher continuously checking the progress of the project and the reporting of the progress by learner" obtained the lowest percentage of agreement responses (48%).

Table 7 shows the frequencies and percentages of learners' responses to the seven items in the third group of strategies (*suggested strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing for exams*).

Table 7

Frequencies of learners' opinion about strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing for exams

Strategies	**SD**		**D**		**SD+D Sum**	**N**		**A**		**SA**		**A+SA Sum**
	F	%	F	%	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	%
Item 15	25	25.8	24	24.7	49	17	17.5	21	21.6	10	10.3	31
Item 16	35	36.1	24	24.7	59	19	19.6	15	15.5	4	4.1	19

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Item 17	13	13.4	7	7.2	20	12	12.4	39	40.2	26	26.8	65
Item 18	8	8.2	16	16.5	24	21	21.6	34	35.1	18	18.6	52
Item 19	4	4.1	6	6.2	10	15	15.5	43	44.3	29	29.9	72
Item 20	2	2.1	6	6.2	8	6	6.2	25	25.8	58	59.8	83
Item 21	4	4.1	10	10.3	14	27	27.8	41	42.3	15	15.5	56

As can be seen in Table, the majority of the students again agreed with the majority of the solutions, less overwhelmingly though. Of the seven items, item 20, "Identifying the most important topics and disregarding unnecessary contents" attracted the highest number of agreements (83%). This item was followed by items 19 (72%), 17 (65%), 21 (56%), and 18 (52%). Item 15, "giving regular quizzes and exams during the term" and Item 16, "asking questions in each session", appealed less strongly to some learners (31% and 19% respectively).

4. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to probe into the solutions and strategies that language teachers and learners suggest to overcome academic

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procrastination. Three-hundred and eighty four suggestions were gathered from 46 English teachers. The thirteen most frequent suggestions from teachers along with eight anti-procrastination strategies selected from related literature were arranged as a Likert-type questionnaire of 21 items to elicit the English language learners' reactions and evaluation as to their effectiveness in overcoming procrastination in three academic task zones. In the following sections, some of the more frequent responses of language teachers and learners to these measures are discussed.

4.1. English teachers' solutions to overcome procrastination in preparing weekly assignments and learners' evaluation of their effectiveness

As Table 1 above displays, the most frequent teachers' suggestion in countering the learners' procrastination of weekly assignments is "Encouraging learners to do assignments by giving extra points". This is in line with previous research findings to the effect that the likelihood of procrastination is more when the unenjoyable activity suggests rewards only in faraway future (Steel and Klingsieck, 2016). Therefore, considering instant rewards can be a more beneficial strategy, which teachers can utilize to decrease the amount of students' procrastination. However, while many teachers in this study have directly emphasized bonus points, one may wonder about the reaction of learners to capitalizing on those immediate rewards which are less material and have to do with good feelings and positive social images or interpersonal relationships. Such rewards and

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incentives were not proposed by the teachers, which may have been due to their experience, or a symptom of a gap in their training, or the failure of the elicitation instrument in this study.

According to Table 5, which shows the frequencies and percentages for agreements/disagreements to suggested strategies to overcome procrastination in preparing weekly assignment, "Adjusting the quantity of assignments to learner's ability" attracted the highest percentage of agreements (81%), followed by "Selecting attractive and diverse assignments" (80%). It seems an important reason students are diverted from academic tasks, prefer to invest on other activities, and ignore deadlines is that the assigned tasks are not appealing to them and/or they perceive them as beyond their ability. In such situations, learners experience fear of failure and become anxious about possible deficient performance; hence, avoidance can be a likely reaction. So, selecting tasks which are cognitively and affectively adjusted to language learners may go a long way in reducing their procrastination. In line with considering learners ability and interest, teacher can also engage in "developing a series of shorter assignments that build on one another [and] encourage less procrastination" (Ackerman and Gross, 2005, p.9). As a result, learners may come to believe in their own efficacy and build sufficient self-efficacy and self-worth for carrying out more difficult tasks.

Not many language learners in this study agreed with the strategy of "Continuously tracking and checking assignments by teacher", In fact, it

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obtained the lowest percentage of agreements (24%). One possible reason can be the anxiety which this strategy may cause. Anxiety, actual and experienced or imagined, for being continuously evaluated by teachers can undermine the motivation of learners. This aversion to evaluation by others may result in an inclination to avoid errors and consequently in academic procrastination (Çapan, 2010).

It is interesting that Item 1 (encouraging by giving extra points), which was the most frequently suggested strategy by teachers, was only moderately supported by learners. In fact, learners supported this solution with a strength comparable to Items 5 (establishing positive attitude) and 6 (emphasizing learners' potentials). This is good news as it shows that learners are not captivated by sources of instrumental motivation so much as they may seem to be. More sustainable and internal sources of motivation, such as awareness and their positive evaluation of tasks, can also make their marks on them as strongly.

4.2. English teachers' solutions to overcome procrastination in preparing term projects and learners' evaluation of their effectiveness

The teachers' most frequent suggestion to overcome procrastination in preparing term projects was "systematic surveillance of the project progress by teacher and reporting the progress by learner". (See Table 2) Teachers probably thought that regular surveillance reminds learners of the set projects and deadlines. In addition, regular assessment can provide teachers

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feedback on effectiveness of their instructions and bestow opportunities on students to prove their ability in carrying out the term project. Probably more importantly, such policy prompts learners to embark on the projects in small and practical steps, without experiencing much toil or anxiety, which in turn decreases the likelihood of procrastination.

Convincing as such reasoning may seem from a teachers' perspective in fighting procrastination, many students did not regard it as a promising solution. In fact, 52 percent of language learners in the sample disagreed with using it to counter project procrastination. (See Table 6) As stated in previous section, the reason for disagreement probably is due to the anxiety that this continuous reminding imposes on learners and, in turn, increases procrastination. Continuous evaluation may help reduce exam anxiety but the stress during the process tend to be high.

The overall results from this part of the learners' questionnaire, however, indicated that most students agreed with the strategies teachers suggested to cancel out learners' procrastination in preparing term projects (Table 6). Among them, strategy 14, "Teacher's proper guidance and providing samples similar to the project to reduce anxiety in learner", obtained the highest number of approving responses (83%). The endorsement of Items 9 and 14, which had to do with task clarification and transparency, either for the sake of anxiety reduction or otherwise, closely matches previous literature: "Instructors may reduce procrastination by laying out step-by-step instructions, being readily available to provide

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timely feedback and clarification, and sharing exemplary completed assignments from past terms" (Ackerman and Gross, 2005, p.9). When rubrics and instructions are clear and students have access to transparent samples and references, i.e., they know exactly what they are expected to do, fear and anxiety around starting the project lessens. On the other hand, when learners face ambiguous and difficult projects, they become anxious and debilitated, unable to cope with the tasks; so, they try to find provisional solace by avoiding them or putting them off to final minutes.

Two other strategies more frequently supported by learners were those conveyed by Items 11 (involving learners in decision making and determining task) and 12 (breaking down tasks into smaller ones). Involving learners in decision making is compatible with self-determination theory of motivation (Ryan, & Deci, 2017), which, among other things, emphasizes the human need to feel free and self-directed in the course of cognitive and social development, and can facilitate learner autonomy. Breaking down tasks into smaller ones, which also enjoys the support of a large amount of literature on time management, self-regulation and success (e.g., Ackerman & Gross, 2005), is a very practical strategy, can be easily implemented, and may result in much anxiety reduction.

4.3. English teachers' solutions to overcome procrastination in preparing for exams and learners' evaluation of their effectiveness

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As shown in Table 3, a relatively large number of teachers suggested "Giving regular quizzes and exams during the term" as a strategy for dealing with procrastination. This makes good teacher's sense: Procrastination may take place when learners perceive the exam as something distant at the end of the course or term; but, when they see it close and have a sense of immediacy, they are more likely to take action. Giving quizzes and mini-exams during the term draws attention to the present or close future, the final exam is perceived as a proximate goal, and the learner is more likely to initiate action and study for the exam. The same justifications can be given for *asking regular class questions*, which, together with *exam reviews*, gained the second frequency rank after the "quiz solution" to the issue of procrastination.

However, 59% and 49% of students disagreed with the "question" and "quiz" strategies, represented by Items 16 and 15, respectively (Table 7). The reason for their disagreement, along with the risk of increased anxiety and fear of failure, might be the negative effect that continuous evaluation may have on learners' autonomy and self-determination. Codina and his colleagues (2018) found that students' procrastination is negatively associated with autonomy-supportive behavior of teachers. "Autonomy-supportive teaching style may contribute to the promotion of motivation and regulation conditions that counteract procrastination, such as the satisfaction of psychological needs, also enhancing students' possibilities of autonomous engagement in learning" (Codina et al., 2018, p.6). It seems

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that language learners are averse to too much explicit direction and guidance by teachers. In view of learners' disposition regarding anxiety, autonomy, and procrastination, it may be advisable that they engage in discovery activities for the most part, with minimal teacher guidance.

Table 7 also shows that "Identifying the most important topics and disregarding unnecessary contents" garnered the highest percentage of approvals (83%). Procrastinators are unwilling to tolerate cognitive discomfort or unpleasantness; they place marginal and undemanding activities ahead of important ones, draining their time and energy away, on the pretext that they can work better under pressure when the deadline looms. Making priorities transparent and disregarding trivial contents may help preempt divergence into less productive activities and create a situation which is conducive to the completion of substantial tasks.

Another possible reason for procrastinators' spending time on unnecessary activities may be unfamiliarity with time management and prioritization strategies. As Paulitzki (2010) comments, weak self-regulatory abilities may cause reluctance to accomplish important and difficult tasks. So, when teachers prioritize important contents, learners will be encouraged to train for and develop these strategies. In fact, 56 percent of the respondents endorsed time-management training strategy, which was represented by Item 21 (See Table 7).

A relatively large percentage of learners agreed with Items 17 and 18, which recommended focusing on exams and practicing for it (65%) and

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distributing exam weighting across multiple quizzes (52%), respectively. This may sound contradictory to their aversion of being directed by teachers and their interpretation of direct tests and questions as a threat to their autonomy; however, one can also allow for a synchronous reality, in the sense that, while learners are not eager to take exams, they have accepted exams and quizzes as a fact of life and are ready to brace for them.

5. Conclusion

The results revealed that most English language teachers recommended the following strategies for encountering students' procrastination in doing weekly assignments, term projects or preparing final exams:

- Encouraging learners to do assignments by giving extra points
- Continuous surveillance of project work by teachers and reporting the progress by learners
- Giving consistent quizzes and exams during the term

Within the range of teacher-proposed anti-procrastination solutions, the following were welcomed by English language learners above others:

- Adjusting the quantity of assignments to learner's ability
- Selecting attractive and diverse assignments
- Teacher's proper guidance and providing example projects to reduce anxiety in learner

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- Identifying the most important topics and disregarding unnecessary contents

There was some moderate disagreement between teachers and learners regarding doing regular evaluation, teacher control, check-ups, and learner autonomy. An issue which seems to mediate the preference for anti-procrastination solutions is whether or not they invoke anxiety, are intrinsically or extrinsically motivating, or enhance self-esteem in learners. These elements have clear instructional implications beyond specific direct solutions if learners are to academically invest sufficient time and energy.

It is worth mentioning that one should not have a parochial assessment of the suggestions of teachers and reactions of the learners, in the sense that they should not be interpreted in isolation and detached from the wider context of learners, but with a farsighted consideration of their needs and goals and a good understanding of human cognition, emotion, and motivation. Without jumping to conclusions about these suggestions and responses, language teaching practitioners should consider them in light of methodological advances in language teaching and the determinants and correlates of procrastination, some of which were mentioned in the Introduction.

Iranian teachers should take the cultural context and psychological traits, individual differences and expectations, needs and beliefs of particular learners into account if they want their anti-procrastination

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attempts to yield sustainable results. Findings from research done locally, particularly research concerning learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching (e.g. Nasrollahi-Mouziraji & Birjandi, 2016), and studies which shed light on Iranian learners' language learning strategy use (e.g., Riazi & Rahimi, 2005), self-regulation behavior and scheduling patterns (e.g., Mallahi et al., 2016), identity formation and investment potential (e.g., Samadi Bahrami, 2013), and teachers' management skills (e.g., Chahkandi, Eslami-Rasekh & Tavakoli, 2016) can be very valuable and help teachers to make methodologically sound and educationally wise decisions. Moreover, the mismatches between learners' and teachers' preferred strategies against procrastination can also be dealt with in the process of such research-informed decisions.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that lack of diverse participants and a matched number of them from each gender in the present study weaken its generalizability. Besides redressing these limitations, future researchers can attempt to more specifically focus on particular cohorts, proficiency levels, or at-risk groups of language learners with poor academic performance to identify what anti-procrastination strategies work for them. In fact, a full panoply of anti-procrastination strategies should go beyond the few items surveyed here. The whole spectrum of teachers and other practitioners as well as a wide range of learners from diverse academic centers in various geographical locations should be approached in the identification and

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validation cycles to provide a more comprehensive inventory of reliable and valid strategies to be added to language teachers' methodological stock.

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Appendix

Selected anti-procrastination strategies in preparing weekly assignments, term projects, and for exams

1. Encouraging learners to do assignments by giving extra points
2. Teachers continuously tracking and checking assignments
3. Adjusting the quantity of assignments to learner's ability
4. Selecting attractive and diverse activities
5. Emphasizing the importance of assignments and establishing a positive attitude about it
6. Raising learners' awareness to their potential and prompting inspirational mottos
7. Teachers continuously checking project activities and demanding progress reports
8. Allocating points for superior projects
9. Providing adequate explanations on the project and clarifying its importance at the beginning of the term
10. Devising group projects
11. Learners involvement in decisions about their learning and choice of projects

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12. Breaking downing projects into smaller tasks and their gradual execution
13. Emphasizing the importance of task prioritizing in academic success and doing the challenging ones first
14. Providing guidance and good models to reduce learners' anxiety
15. Frequent quizzes and exams during the term
16. Regular class questions
17. Practicing and reviewing the contents of final exams
18. Distributing the total term points across quizzes, projects, and final exams
19. Motivating learners for language learning to stabilize their learning
20. Identifying important topics and disregarding insignificant contents
21. Telling learners about time management skills and study skills

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