

Study habits and procrastination in university students in southeastern Mexico Hábitos de estudio y procrastinación en estudiantes universitarios del sureste de México

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Abstract:

Study habits are essential for efficient learning among university students, particularly in highly demanding fields such as health sciences. However, their relationship with academic procrastination is complex and requires further investigation. This study aimed to analyze the levels and relationship between study habits and procrastination among university students in Tabasco, Mexico. A quantitative, descriptive, and correlational cross-sectional design was employed, with a sample of 388 participants selected from a population of 5,615 students using probabilistic sampling. The CASM-85 and EPA instruments, both with validated psychometric properties, were applied, and data were processed using SPSS v29. The results revealed a significant correlation between both constructs, indicating that study habits do not necessarily lead to reduced procrastination. It is concluded that study techniques and procrastination interact in a multidimensional manner, influenced by psychological, instrumental, and environmental factors, highlighting the need for comprehensive educational interventions.

Keywords:

Academic procrastination, educational assessment, self-regulation, study techniques

Resumen:

Los hábitos de estudio son fundamentales para el aprendizaje eficiente en estudiantes universitarios, especialmente en áreas de alta exigencia como las ciencias de la salud. Sin embargo, su relación con la procrastinación académica presenta características complejas que requieren análisis. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar los niveles y la relación entre los hábitos de estudio y la procrastinación en estudiantes universitarios del estado de Tabasco. Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo y correlacional de tipo transversal, con una muestra de 388 participantes seleccionados de una población de 5,615 estudiantes, mediante muestreo probabilístico. Se aplicaron los instrumentos CASM-85 y EPA, ambos con propiedades psicométricas validadas, y se procesaron los datos mediante el software SPSS v29. Los resultados revelaron una correlación significativa entre ambos constructos, destacando que los hábitos de estudio no siempre se traducen en una menor procrastinación. Se concluye que las técnicas de estudio y la procrastinación interactúan de forma multidimensional, influenciadas por factores psicológicos, instrumentales y ambientales, lo que sugiere la necesidad de intervenciones educativas integrales.

Palabras Clave:

Autorregulación, evaluación educativa, procrastinación académica, técnicas de estudio

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, university students face increasingly complex academic demands, especially those in the health sciences, where rigorous and consistent performance is essential. In this context, implementing and strengthening effective study strategies are fundamental for achieving effective learning. However, study habits—understood as the techniques students use to understand the content of learning units—are frequently compromised by academic procrastination. This includes the ability to avoid distractions, maintain focus on the material, and make sustained efforts throughout the learning process (Salinas-Padilla et al., 2022).

Despite recognizing the importance of these habits, it is common for students to engage in academic procrastination, defined as the voluntary postponement of starting or completing assigned tasks. This behavior is often motivated by the perception of activities as tedious or unattractive, generating dissatisfaction and discomfort (Álvarez-Blas, 2010; Elizondo et al., 2024; Porras & Ortega, 2021; Ramón García et al., 2021). Furthermore, factors such as disorganization and poor time management contribute to this incidence (Johansson et al., 2023).

Under this assumption, it is imperative to objectively assess the growing incidence of this behavior in the Mexican university context. A study conducted with nursing students in the central-western region of the country revealed that 75% exhibited moderate levels of procrastination, associated with inefficient time management (Esquivel Pedraza et al., 2024). Furthermore, evidence from pilot studies in medicine indicates that, although an educational intervention improved time management, it did not significantly reduce procrastination; this suggests the influence of additional factors such as motivation, which require further scientific investigation (Avalos Latorre et al., 2024).

Study habits constitute a series of systematic behaviors employed by students to facilitate and simplify knowledge acquisition and improve their academic performance. These practices include time management, the selection of study techniques, the preparation of the workspace, and consistency in completing tasks (Castro Luna et al., 2024). Their proper implementation allows students to more effectively meet academic demands, especially in areas such as health, where the cognitive load is high.

In a study conducted by Vincent (2006, cited by Castro Luna et al. (2024)), it is highlighted that learning techniques are consolidated through the constant repetition of actions, and that their effectiveness is largely conditioned by the student's personal interest and motivation. Enríquez et al. (2015, cited by De Brea et al. (2023)) complements this view by defining study techniques as specific strategies that promote academic

success, such as the creation of summaries, outlines, concept maps, and the use of supplementary resources.

Other studies have shown that study techniques improve academic performance. They have also been identified as potentially influencing the reduction of procrastination. Along the same lines, Pimienta et al. (2024) emphasize that concentration, accurate information perception, and memory are essential skills that are strengthened through good habits, allowing students to assimilate knowledge more efficiently.

To understand the structure of these practices, it is imperative to articulate the psychological, instrumental, and environmental determinants that influence the consolidation of study habits. According to Horna (2001, cited by Ibarra de Leguizamón (2023)), the determinants that influence study habits are classified into three categories: psychological, instrumental, and environmental.

In this sense, while psychological factors include aspects such as motivation, self-efficacy, metacognitive processes, and emotional self-regulation, instrumental factors focus on time management, task organization, the selection of learning techniques, and the use of technological tools. When these relationships are not managed adequately, they can negatively affect the effectiveness of studying (Artino & Stephens, 2009; Biggs, 1985, cited by Ibarra de Leguizamón (2023)). Another related dimension is the environmental one, which acquires critical relevance in the formation of these practices; having a study area is essential. Being free from distractions is essential to mitigate stress and prevent the establishment of procrastination behaviors (Pallo-Pilalumbo et al., 2024).

From this perspective, recent studies have shown that the frequent consumption of social networks in the daily lives of students has identified failures in self-regulation, transforming academic responsibilities into tasks constantly interrupted by immediate digital gratification (García Martínez & Silva Payró, 2019). This dynamic corroborates the findings of Senecal and Guay (Quan and Sánchez, 2012, cited by Ovando Leyva and Rodríguez Falcon, 2024), who explain that procrastination emerges more strongly when academic work is perceived as unrewarding compared to more enjoyable digital alternatives assigned to students. Aguirre et al. (2024), in their study, reported that 67% of marketing students consider themselves addicted to social media, which negatively impacts their study habits, sleep quality, and emotional well-being. Specialized scientific literature shows that this phenomenon is not unique to students but manifests itself through various behavioral typologies. In this sense, procrastination can be classified as sporadic or chronic, the latter generally compromising academic performance (Cárdenas Mass et al., 2021). A study conducted by San Roslan and Sabouripour (2016, cited by Pereira et al. (2024)) demonstrated that students with a

greater tendency to procrastinate use effective study strategies less frequently.

Recent research has shown that procrastination is not necessarily a consequence of a lack of study habits, but rather that both phenomena can coexist due to critical failures in self-regulation processes (Ricarte et al., 2025). In a study conducted by Altamirano & Rodríguez (2021) and Garzón & Gil (2017), cited by Avalos Latorre et al. (2024), it was identified that 70% of university students practice procrastination, motivated by factors such as fear of failure, lack of motivation, personal problems, and perfectionism. Therefore, theories such as Steel's (2007) temporal theory and the Integrative Model suggest that impulsivity and low expectation of success can intensify avoidance behavior, even in the presence of prior organizational strategies (Ricarte et al., 2025). This dynamic is reinforced by the self-discrepancy theory proposed by Higgins (1987), where the gap between actual and ideal performance generates frustration that leads to task avoidance (Bay-Alarcón et al., 2024). Therefore, whether it manifests passively, due to anxiety, or actively as an intentional search for Working under pressure, procrastination emerges as a multidimensional construct that demands comprehensive analysis (Ayala Ramírez et al., 2020; Dominguez-Lara et al., 2022; Perdomo & Feliciano-García, 2020).

Based on this conceptual framework, the present study aims to evaluate the relationship between study habits and academic procrastination in the university community of the health sciences in southeastern Mexico.

METHOD

The study was developed under a quantitative approach, with a descriptive-analytical scope and a cross-sectional design; the analysis was oriented to determine the relationships between the dimensions of the applied instruments.

The total population consisted of 5,615 students from the five undergraduate programs: 1. Medical Surgeon, 2. Nursing, 3. Dental Surgeon, 4. Psychology, and 5. Nutrition, enrolled in the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters. 360 students were selected through simple random sampling using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. However, a substantial number of 388 participants were included in the study. 388 participantes que se incluyeron en la investigación.

Measuring instruments

To examine these practices, standardized instruments were used. Among them was the Academic Procrastination Scale (EPA), developed by Deborah Ann Busko in 1998 (Álvarez-Blas, 2010). Study habits were assessed using the CASM-85 Study Habits Inventory, created by psychologist Luis Vicuña Peri (1985), which has remained relevant through updates (Figueroa-Quñones et al., 2019).

EPA Scale

The EPA instrument was adapted to Spanish and validated by Álvarez-Blas (2010), with a 16-item structure and Likert-type scale responses, ranging from 1=Never, 2=Almost Never, 3=Sometimes, 4=Almost Always, and 5=Always. Subsequently, Zumárraga Espinosa & Cevallos Pozo (2020) conducted a psychometric evaluation of this scale, using a confirmatory factor analysis that showed that the items were sufficient to collect the information required for evaluation through a two-dimensional EPA reduced to 12 items, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

In this research, the EPA version consisting of 12 items was applied. To ensure the accuracy of the measurement, the internal consistency analysis was performed using Cronbach's Alpha, obtaining a score of 0.85, which confirms that it continues to maintain the reliability of the construct in the Tabasco university context.

CASM-85 Inventory

The CASM-85 was created in 1985 and reprinted in 2005 and 2014. The 2014 reprint suggests adding two items to the original questionnaire; however, there is no evidence to support this proposal (Figueroa-Quñones et al., 2019). To assess the study habits of university students in this study, the original 53-item CASM-85 was used. According to Figueroa-Quñones et al. (2019), the CASM-85 achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 in the test-retest. In this study population, it reached 0.80, confirming that it maintains good internal consistency. The items that make up this test are distributed across five areas: I. How do you study? (12 items); II. How do you do your homework? (10 items); III. How do you prepare for your exams? (11 items); IV. How do you listen to your classes? (12 items); V. What accompanies your study time? (8 items) (Figueroa-Quñones et al., 2019). Each item on the CASM-85 is answered dichotomously (Always=1, Never=0). In the areas that make up the instrument, there are items that are scored inversely (Always=0, Never=1) to ensure that there is no alteration in the dimensionality of the CASM-85 (Figueroa-Quñones et al., 2019). According to Vicuña's 1998 manual, a greater number of positive responses indicates better implementation of study habits, and conversely, a greater number of negative responses is related to incorrect execution of study habits.

Procedure

Data was collected through online surveys administered via Google Forms, which were distributed to the entire student population using a QR code.

The instruments were previously administered to a pilot test with 29 students, who were not included in the final sample. This test was conducted to evaluate the comprehension and clarity of each item. Upon completion of the pilot test, it was found that students expressed confusion when answering the CASM-85, as they were unable to adequately interpret the items. Because the questionnaire uses a dichotomous (always-never) format, the students stated that the responses did not reflect their own practices. Therefore, minor adjustments were made to

items 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 39, 40, and 46-53, adapting the grammar and terminology to a more understandable language for university students, while ensuring the psychometric robustness of each item and the instrument as a whole.

Information Processing

For the statistical evaluation of the collected data, they were recorded and coded using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 statistical program. Descriptive analyses, frequency tables, and Spearman's correlation were applied.

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RESULTS

The study consisted of a sample of 388 students, 65% (256) women and 34.5% (134) men, aged between 18 and 26 years. Regarding their academic program, 39.2% (152) of the students were enrolled in the Medical Surgeon program, 17% (66) in the Dental Surgeon program, 15.5% (60) in Nursing, 15.5% (60) in Nutrition, and 12.9% (50) in Psychology. As for their academic year, 58.5% (227) were in their second semester, 21.6% (84) in their fourth semester, 13.4% (52) in their sixth semester, and 6.4% (25) in their eighth semester.

Next, the dimensions of the CASM-85 instrument were reviewed, revealing distinct response patterns in each of its five dimensions, as well as in the overall CASM-85 score. Regarding dimension 1 (D1), "How do you study?", 16% (62) of the students rated themselves very positively, 29.9% (116) positively, and 43.3% (168) with a positive tendency, indicating an inclination toward appropriate study habits. In contrast, 10.6% (41) of the population showed a negative tendency, and 0.3% (19) received a negative rating. No cases with negative scores were recorded in this category.

Regarding dimension 2 (D2), "How do you do your homework?", higher levels in this dimension were less frequent. Only 1.8% (7) achieved a very positive rating, 6.4% (25) were rated positive, and 20.9% (81) showed a positive trend. Conversely, 49.7% (193) showed a negative trend, followed by 20.9% (81) at a negative level and 0.3% (1) at a very negative level, revealing an unfavorable pattern in dimension 2.

Regarding dimension 3 (D3): How do you prepare for your exams? 1.8% (7) of the participants were rated very positive, 8% (31) at a positive level, and 21.1% (82) showed a positive trend. However, the majority of these participants demonstrated difficulties in this area, as 46.9% (182) showed a negative trend, 20.6% negative, and 1.5% (6) very negative.

En lo que respecta a la dimensión 4 (D4): ¿cómo escucha usted sus clases? Se encontró mayor dispersión en las respuestas. Se observó que un 6.4 % (25) alcanzó una valoración muy positiva, el 17 % (66) una valoración positiva, seguido del 22.7 % (88) que se clasificó en tendencia positiva. En contraposición, el 20.4 % (79) de la población se clasificó en tendencia negativa, el 27.8 % (108) presentó niveles de valoración negativa y el 5.7 % (22) en muy negativo.

Regarding dimension 5 (D5), what accompanies your study time? It was observed that 5.7% (22) presented a very positive level, 3.6% (14) showed a positive level, and 5.2% (20) exhibited a positive trend. In contrast, 15.2% (59) showed a negative trend, while 68.8% (267) indicated a negative level, and only 1.5% (6) reflected a severely negative level.

Concerning the overall scores obtained from the CASM-85, it was identified that 2.3% (9) of the participants were at very positive levels. Simultaneously, 6.4% (25) reached a positive level, and 25.5% (99) showed a positive trend. On the other hand, 54.1% (210), corresponding to the majority of participants, showed a negative trend, while 11.6% (45) presented a very negative level. (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Levels of study habits in the dimensions of the CASM-85 in university students

Rating level	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	CASM-85
Very positive	16% (62)	1.8% (7)	1.8% (7)	6.4% (25)	5.7% (22)	2.3% (9)
Positive	29.9% (116)	6.4% (25)	8% (31)	17% (66)	3.6% (14)	6.4% (25)
Positive trend	43.3% (168)	20.9% (81)	21.1% (82)	22.7% (88)	5.2% (20)	25.5% (99)
Negative trend	10.6% (41)	49.7% (193)	46.9% (182)	20.4% (79)	15.2% (59)	54.1% (210)
Negative	0.3% (19)	20.9% (81)	20.6% (80)	27.8% (108)	68.8% (267)	11.6% (45)
Very negative	—	0.3% (1)	1.5% (6)	5.7% (22)	1.5% (6)	—

Regarding the Academic Self-Regulation (ARA) dimension of the EPA instrument, 27.8% (108) of the students showed a very high level of self-regulation, while 37.9% (147) reported maintaining a high level, demonstrating strong self-regulation. On the other hand, 29.9% (116) presented a regular level, demonstrating moderate self-regulation, and only 4.4% (17) reported a low level.

As for the Task Procrastination (TP) category, 3.1% (12) of the participants obtained very high levels of procrastination, while 17% (66) were at a high level, reflecting a recurring tendency to postpone academic activities. On the other hand, 24.7% (96) presented a moderate level, in contrast to the 35.1% (136) corresponding to the majority of participants, who reported a low level, and 20.1% (78) a very low level.

Regarding the overall scores obtained from the EPA instrument (EPA Global Scale), it was observed that 0.8% (3) of the students were classified at a very high level of procrastination, while 17.3% (67) reported maintaining a high level. Simultaneously, 70.9% (275) were at a moderate level, unlike the 11.1% who indicated a low level (See Table 2).

Table 2.
EPA instrument rating levels

Rating level	ARA	PT	EPA Global Scale
Very high	27.8% (108)	3.1% (12)	0.8% (3)
High	37.9% (147)	17% (66)	17.3% (67)
Regular	29.9% (116)	24.7% (96)	70.9% (275)
Low	4.4% (17)	35.1% (136)	11.1% (43)
Very Low	—	20.1% (78)	—

An evaluation and analysis was conducted between the dimensions of the CASM-85 and the EPA instrument using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The analysis began with dimension D1, Study, of the CASM-85 and the EPA instrument (Table 3), which revealed a moderate, significant negative correlation ($r = -0.391, p = 0.001$). This indicates that students with lower levels of study skills exhibited higher levels of procrastination, and this was the only negative relationship found. On the other hand, the remaining correlations showed significant positive associations between low and high levels, meaning that both variables tended to increase simultaneously.

Consequently, the correlation between dimension D2, Tasks, and EPA revealed a coefficient of $r = 0.514, p =$

0.001 , indicating a high and significant correlation. Similarly, a moderate, significant positive relationship ($r = 0.491, p = 0.001$) was found between dimension D3, Exams, and EPA, which was the highest among the statistical relationships. Similarly, a moderate significant relationship ($r=0.461, p=0.001$) was found between dimension D4 and the EPA, while dimension D5, Accompaniment, showed a low significant correlation ($r=0.22, p=0.001$). Finally, a correlation was performed between the EPA scale and the CASM-85 Global Scale, which revealed a moderate direct correlation ($r=0.462, p=0.001$) between the two instruments.

Table 3.
Spearman correlation between the EPA scale and CASM-85

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	CAS M-85
EPA Glob al Scale	-0.391**	0.514**	0.491**	0.461**	0.220**	0.462**
	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the levels and relationship between study habits and academic procrastination in university students at the Academic Division of Health Sciences (DACS). The results obtained using the CASM-85 instrument revealed that more than half of the participants (54.1%) exhibit a negative trend in their study habits, indicating poorly consolidated and possibly inefficient practices. In contrast, the overall EPA scale showed that 70.9% of the students maintain regular levels of procrastination, suggesting a moderate postponement of academic activities.

Analyzing the instruments together revealed an imbalance between study strategies and procrastination practices. Although procrastination behaviors are not predominant, the lack of effective study techniques could be a contributing factor, negatively impacting academic performance. These results align with those reported by Porras & Ortega (2021), who found that academic procrastination is a prevalent phenomenon among students. Similarly, the results obtained using the EPA scale demonstrate that 67.8% of students maintain high and regular levels of Academic Self-Regulation; that is, they believe they know how to organize, regulate, and study effectively. However, when evaluating actual study habits using the CASM-85 instrument, it was evident that more than half of the participants (54.1%) exhibited a negative trend, meaning they maintain inadequate study habits. This contradiction between students' perceptions and their actual practices is particularly relevant.

This imbalance between perceived self-regulation and actual study habits is particularly significant. Although students

report high levels of academic self-regulation (67.8% at high and regular levels), the CASM-85 results show that their concrete practices do not reflect this perception. This dissonance can be explained through the self discrepancy theory (Bay-Alarcón et al., 2024) which posits conflicts between the “ideal self”, the “self as it should be” and the “real self”, generating frustration, demotivation and avoidance behaviors such as procrastination.

Statistical analyses showed significant correlations between study habits and academic procrastination, with coefficients ranging from -0.391 to 0.491 ($p = 0.001$). The overall correlation between the two instruments was positive and moderate ($r = 0.462$), which contradicts previous studies reporting negative associations between these variables (Córdova-Torres & Alarcón-Arias, 2019). This finding suggests that, in this population, study habits do not necessarily reduce procrastination, but rather can coexist with it.

Furthermore, this positive correlation indicates that deficient study habits tend to be associated with less procrastination; likewise, as study habits improve, procrastination increases. This finding is relevant because it contradicts previous research, which typically reports negative correlations between the two variables; that is, better study habits are associated with less procrastination.

On the other hand, the positive correlations in dimensions such as “exam preparation” ($r = 0.491$) and “study support” ($r = 0.220$) reinforce the idea that the presence of habits does not guarantee their effectiveness or their impact on reducing procrastination. This is consistent with Zimmerman's self-regulation cycle theory (Ricarte et al., 2025), which states that planning, monitoring, and reflection are essential to avoid procrastinating behaviors.

Furthermore, research such as that by Avalos Latorre et al. (2024) has shown that time management interventions can improve certain skills without necessarily reducing procrastination, suggesting the influence of emotional, motivational, and contextual factors. In this regard, Ibarra de Leguizamón (2023) concurs that emotional self-regulation and motivation are key components for establishing effective study habits and preventing procrastination.

Taken together, the findings of this research highlight the complexity of the relationship between study habits and procrastination, and underscore the need for comprehensive approaches that consider not only instrumental techniques but also the psychological and environmental factors that determine the academic behavior of students in academic training.

CONCLUSION

The results show that more than half of the students have poor study habits, while the majority maintain regular levels of procrastination. Although students perceive themselves as having good self-regulation, their actual practices do not reflect this, highlighting a discrepancy between what they believe they do and what they actually do.

A positive correlation was found between study habits and procrastination, which contradicts previous studies. This suggests that both can coexist, especially when habits are not implemented effectively or are influenced by emotional and contextual factors. The only negative correlation was found in the dimension “How do you study?”, indicating that certain specific techniques could reduce procrastination. However, in general, habits alone do not guarantee less procrastination.

The study is not without limitations, given that both instruments used (CASM-85 and EPA) are based on self-report questionnaires, which could influence participants' responses, leading them to reflect a socially acceptable stance, exaggerate positive habits, and downplay negative behaviors such as procrastination. Furthermore, as a cross-sectional study, the data were collected at a single point in time, allowing for the analysis of variations between variables, but limiting the ability to track changes over time.

Nevertheless, it provides a foundation for future research aimed at designing interventions that go beyond simply teaching study techniques, promoting stronger academic self-regulation by considering aspects such as cognitive, emotional, and motivational management.

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