

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Predicting Academic Dishonesty Based on Academic Procrastination: The Mediating Role of Academic Self-Efficacy in Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to predict academic dishonesty based on academic procrastination with consideration of the mediating role of academic self-efficacy among male elementary school students in the second cycle of primary education in Ferdows County. The research method was correlational and based on structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population included all male students in the fourth to sixth grades of elementary schools in Ferdows County, from whom 340 participants were selected using stratified random sampling. The research instruments consisted of Solomon and Rothblum's (1984) Academic Procrastination Questionnaire, Bandura's (1997) Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, and the Academic Dishonesty Questionnaire, McCabe (1993). Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 and AMOS-24 software. The results indicated a positive and significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty ($r = 0.58$), a negative and significant relationship between academic procrastination and academic self-efficacy ($r = -0.61$), and a negative and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic dishonesty ($r = -0.54$). The structural model also demonstrated a good fit. Academic self-efficacy played a significant mediating role in the relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty. The findings suggest that academic procrastination increases the likelihood of academic dishonesty through reducing academic self-efficacy. Therefore, strengthening academic self-efficacy can serve as an effective protective factor against academic dishonesty.

KEYWORDS

Social Constructivism, Social Engineering, Education System, Erdoğan, Türkiye.



Introduction

In addition to the transfer of knowledge and skills, educational systems worldwide bear a significant responsibility for cultivating ethical values, individual accountability, and behavioral norms among students. A major threat to achieving these objectives is the proliferation of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty refers to a range of unethical behaviors in educational settings, including cheating on exams, plagiarism, unauthorized use of resources, fabrication of data, manipulation of results, and presenting others' work as one's own (McCabe et al., 2012; Anderman & Murdock, 2011). This phenomenon is not merely a simple academic infraction; rather, it may serve as an indicator of deficiencies in the internalization of ethical values, reduced accountability, poor self-regulation, and inadequacies in students' coping skills (Rettinger & Kramer, 2009). Extensive research has demonstrated that frequent exposure to academic dishonesty in early years of education increases the likelihood of persistent unethical behavior in subsequent academic, professional, and social life (Nunez & Swift, 2001). A student who employs unhealthy paths to achieve success gradually learns that the outcome is more important than the process, a mindset that can pave the way for opportunistic behavior in adulthood. Therefore, identifying the contributing factors to academic dishonesty at a young age, particularly during primary education, is of paramount importance. One significant variable that has garnered researchers' attention in recent years is academic procrastination. Academic procrastination refers to the intentional and irrational delay of assignments, studying, exam preparation, and other educational tasks, despite awareness of their negative consequences (Steel, 2007). Procrastinating students typically delay tasks until the last minute, consequently facing time pressure, anxiety, diminished preparation, and feelings of inadequacy. In such circumstances, the likelihood of them gravitating toward quick and unhealthy solutions, such as cheating or utilizing unauthorized assistance, increases (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). International studies have shown a significant positive correlation between academic procrastination and various forms of academic dishonesty. Students who struggle with time management and initiating tasks on time are more susceptible to examination cheating, plagiarism, and similar behaviors (Arogundade, 2024; Patrzek et al., 2015). These findings suggest that academic dishonesty is not always a consequence of moral deficiency; rather, it is sometimes the result of failure in self-management and an inability to regulate behavior. In explaining this relationship, academic self-efficacy can play a key role. Academic self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks, learn content, manage educational challenges, and achieve academic success (Bandura, 1997). Based on Bandura's social-cognitive theory, individuals with a higher sense of capability demonstrate greater persistence when facing difficult tasks, experience less anxiety, and are less likely to resort to avoidance or procrastination. Conversely, those with low self-efficacy perceive academic challenges as threatening and become discouraged more easily (Chong & DiBenedetto, 2020). Research has shown that academic self-efficacy is negatively correlated with procrastination; meaning that as students feel more capable, the likelihood of delaying assignments decreases (Klassen et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2020). Furthermore, high self-efficacy can reduce the likelihood of academic dishonesty, as more capable students feel less need to resort to illicit means to achieve success (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Therefore, it is possible that academic self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty. The upper elementary level (grades four through six) is considered a sensitive stage in terms of cognitive, social, and moral development. At these ages, students

gradually develop a clearer understanding of rules, fairness, competition, and the consequences of their behavior. At the same time, academic pressure, social comparison, parental expectations, and the importance of grades also increase (Esl & Roser, 2011). If skills such as self-regulation, time management, and belief in one's own abilities are not strengthened at this stage, the likelihood of maladaptive behavioral patterns emerging will increase. Focusing on male students is also important for several reasons. Some studies have shown that boys, compared with girls, exhibit greater vulnerability in certain aspects of academic self-regulation, impulse control, and adherence to school rules (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). In addition, social pressures related to competition, achievement, and the display of ability may, in some cases, lead them toward shortcut behaviors. Despite the importance of this issue, a review of the literature indicates that most studies on academic dishonesty and procrastination have been conducted among university students or secondary school students, while few studies have examined elementary school students, especially boys. Moreover, the mediating role of academic self-efficacy in this age group has received less attention. On the other hand, examining these variables in local contexts and less-studied areas such as Ferdows County can provide valuable information for educational planning and school-based interventions. Accordingly, the present study was conducted with the aim of predicting academic dishonesty based on academic procrastination, with attention to the mediating role of academic self-efficacy among male students in the upper elementary grades of Ferdows County. It is expected that the findings of this study will help lay the groundwork for designing preventive programs based on self-regulation skills training, strengthening self-efficacy, and promoting academic ethics.

Method

Research Design

The present study was applied in terms of its purpose and, in terms of its nature and implementation, falls within the category of descriptive-correlational research. Given that this study examines the direct and indirect relationships among academic procrastination, academic self-efficacy, and academic dishonesty, the research design is specifically based on structural equation modeling, with a path analysis approach and mediation testing. This method was deemed appropriate for the present study due to its ability to simultaneously examine multivariate relationships, estimate direct and indirect effects, and assess the fit of the conceptual model (Kline, 2023).

Statistical Population

The statistical population of the study consisted of all male students enrolled in grades four, five, and six of elementary schools in Ferdows County during the 2025–2026 academic year. Based on statistics obtained from the county's Department of Education, the number of these students was estimated at approximately 1,300. This population was selected because of the importance of the upper elementary stage in the formation of academic attitudes, the development of self-regulation, responsibility, and the consolidation of behavioral patterns.

Sample and Sampling Method

Considering the nature of structural equation modeling and the need for an adequate sample size, the sample size was determined based on several criteria. First, according to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, a population of 1,300 requires a sample size of approximately 297 participants. Second, in structural modeling analysis, it is recommended that 5 to 15 observations be considered for each free parameter (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, the final sample size was considered appropriate to be between 300 and 350 participants. To increase statistical accuracy and compensate for incomplete questionnaires, 340 questionnaires were distributed. The sampling method was proportional stratified random sampling. Accordingly, the population was first divided into three strata based on grade level (fourth, fifth, and sixth grades). Then, the share of each stratum was determined in proportion to the number of students in that grade, and finally, participants were randomly selected from each stratum. This method increases sample representativeness and reduces sampling error.

Instrumentation, Validity, and Reliability

To assess the face and content validity of the questionnaires, the instruments were reviewed by several experts in educational psychology and research methodology to ensure the clarity, appropriateness, and adequacy of the items. Furthermore, the reliability of the instruments was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability (CR).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 27) and AMOS (version 24). Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and the minimum and maximum scores, were reported. To examine the mediating role of academic self-efficacy, the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval (CI) was employed. The mediating effect is considered significant if the confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- There is a significant positive relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty among male students.
- There is a significant negative relationship between academic procrastination and academic self-efficacy.
- There is a significant negative relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic dishonesty.
- Academic self-efficacy mediates the relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty.

Results

The present study showed that academic procrastination can directly and indirectly predict academic dishonesty through a reduction in academic self-efficacy among male students in the upper elementary grades. These findings suggest that, in this age group, academic dishonesty is not merely an ethical issue; rather, it is largely rooted in deficiencies in self-regulation and motivational beliefs. By creating time pressure, procrastination weakens

academic self-efficacy, and this decline, in turn, provides a basis for justifying unethical behaviors. Given the sensitivity of the upper elementary period in the formation of long-term behavioral and moral patterns, it is necessary to design and implement early educational interventions focused on teaching time-management skills, self-regulation, and strengthening students' beliefs in their academic capabilities. It is recommended that school-based programs, including self-efficacy enhancement workshops, time-management training, and the practical integration of academic ethics values, be systematically implemented. In addition, longitudinal and comparative studies are recommended to provide a deeper understanding of these relationships. Ultimately, attention to academic self-efficacy as a key variable may represent an important step toward preventing academic dishonesty and fostering a generation that is responsible and ethically oriented.

Discussion and conclusion

The results of the correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) indicated that the relationships among the study variables were in the expected directions, and the model fit indices supported the appropriateness of the proposed conceptual model. Furthermore, all research hypotheses were supported by the empirical data. These findings are highly consistent with the theoretical framework of the study, particularly Bandura's (1997) social-cognitive theory and various approaches to self-regulation. The results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty ($r=0.58$). This finding is consistent with previous studies such as Patrzek et al. (2015) and Arogaslen (2024). From an explanatory perspective, academic procrastination places students in stressful situations due to acute time pressure and lack of preparation. Under such circumstances, the likelihood of resorting to quick but unethical solutions—such as cheating, copying assignments, or unauthorized use of resources—increases. Consequently, academic dishonesty is often not merely a reflection of moral deficiency, but rather a byproduct of failure in self-management and emotional regulation. Furthermore, a significant negative relationship was found between academic procrastination and academic self-efficacy ($r=-0.61$), aligning with studies by Klassen et al. (2008), Liu et al. (2020), and Tamaddoni (2010). This can be interpreted as follows: the chronic postponement of tasks accumulates experiences of failure, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness, which gradually undermines the student's belief in their academic capabilities. This decline in self-efficacy, in turn, creates a vicious cycle that further exacerbates procrastination. The third hypothesis was also supported, revealing a significant negative relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic dishonesty ($r=-0.54$), a result consistent with findings by Murdock and Anderman (2006) and Sabzian (2021). Students with high self-efficacy perceive academic challenges as manageable and attainable, and therefore, feel less need to utilize unethical shortcuts. Conversely, low self-efficacy fosters cognitive justifications for unethical behavior, as the individual perceives success through legitimate means as difficult or impossible. Finally, the study confirmed the mediating role of academic self-efficacy in the relationship between academic procrastination and academic dishonesty. This indicates that academic procrastination primarily predicts dishonesty indirectly through the erosion of perceived academic competence. This mediation pattern aligns with recent research by Huang (2025), Astatek (2025), and Sabzian (2021), highlighting the importance of self-efficacy as a pivotal variable. In other words, the procrastinating student first experiences a loss of confidence in

their abilities, and this reduced self-efficacy subsequently paves the way for the acceptance and rationalization of dishonest behaviors.

In conclusion, the findings emphasize that academic dishonesty in upper elementary school should not be viewed solely as a moral issue; rather, it should be examined within the framework of self-regulation and motivational challenges. The study's focus on male students is particularly significant, as this demographic may be more vulnerable regarding impulse control and self-regulation. While these findings largely align with previous literature, limitations such as the reliance on a single-county sample and the cross-sectional nature of the study may constrain the generalizability of the results, which will be further addressed in the conclusion section.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed to the data curation, writing, and editing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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