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## **Understanding Procrastination as Habitual Pattern in ESL Classrooms: An NLP intervention study**



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**Abstract**

Academic procrastination is a pervasive barrier to linguistic proficiency, often stemming from deep-seated cognitive habits rather than simple time mismanagement. This study investigates the phenomenon of academic procrastination among undergraduate English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, specifically through the lens of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). The research aims to measure procrastination levels, identify the most procrastinated language skills, and analyze the specific NLP Meta-Model patterns—Deletion, Distortion, and Generalization—that sustain these avoidance behaviors. Employing a mixed-methods research design, data were collected from 30 undergraduate students enrolled in Public Universities in the Hazara region, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study utilized the Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS) by Solomon and Rothblum (1984) to quantify procrastination frequency and elicit qualitative reasoning for delays. Quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics revealed a high overall procrastination level ( $M=3.68$ ), with "Writing" identified as the most significantly avoided skill ( $M=4.25$ ). The qualitative findings, processed through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, uncovered that students predominantly use "Distortion" (specifically Mind-Reading regarding teacher evaluation) and "Generalization" (Universal Quantifiers regarding failure) to linguistically justify their inaction. The study concludes that procrastination is a structured linguistic habit, suggesting that NLP-based interventions could effectively reframe these internal dialogues to enhance academic engagement.

**Keywords:** Academic Procrastination, ESL Learners, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Meta-Model Patterns, Writing Anxiety, Habitual Patterns, Thematic Analysis

**Chapter 1: Introduction****1.1 Background of the Study**

In the contemporary globalized academic environment, proficiency in English as a Second Language has become a decisive factor in determining educational achievement and professional mobility. English now functions not merely as a subject of study but as the primary medium through which academic knowledge is accessed, assessed, and evaluated. Within Pakistan, and particularly in the higher education institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this pressure is intensified by institutional demands, competitive academic structures, and limited linguistic exposure outside formal classrooms. For many undergraduate learners, the challenge of acquiring academic English is persistent and psychologically demanding.

Amid these challenges, academic procrastination emerges as a critical yet often misunderstood barrier to effective language learning. Procrastination is commonly defined as the voluntary postponement of intended academic tasks despite an awareness of the negative consequences associated with delay. However, reducing procrastination to a mere failure of time management oversimplifies a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in cognitive, emotional, and linguistic processes. It is not simply about postponing work. It is about how learners internally construct meaning around

tasks, competence, and failure.

For undergraduate ESL learners, procrastination does not manifest uniformly. It varies across the four core language skills of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. A learner may consistently delay reading tasks due to cognitive overload, while another may avoid writing assignments because of perfectionistic anxiety. Speaking activities are often postponed due to fear of social exposure, whereas listening tasks may be ignored due to low perceived control. These patterns suggest that procrastination is skill-specific and psychologically structured rather than random or incidental.

Recent developments in educational psychology and cognitive linguistics indicate that such avoidance behaviors are shaped by internal representational systems and habitual patterns of thought. Neuro-Linguistic Programming provides a conceptual framework to examine these internal processes. NLP proposes that individuals experience reality through subjective filters governed by three universal modeling processes: Deletion, through which certain information is omitted; Distortion, through which experiences are reshaped or exaggerated; and Generalization, through which broad conclusions are drawn from limited experiences. When applied to ESL learning contexts, these processes help explain how learners linguistically justify delay, avoidance, and withdrawal. By employing the NLP Meta-Model within ESL classrooms in the Hazara region, this study reconceptualizes procrastination not as laziness or lack of motivation, but as a patterned cognitive-linguistic habit that can be identified, analyzed, and potentially transformed.

### **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

Despite the undeniable importance of English language competence for academic survival and progression in Pakistani universities, a substantial number of undergraduate students in the Hazara region exhibit persistent and chronic academic procrastination. This habitual delay in initiating or completing ESL-related tasks has far-reaching consequences. It intensifies academic anxiety, undermines performance outcomes, and ultimately arrests the development of communicative competence.

The fundamental problem lies in the way procrastination is currently understood and addressed within pedagogical practices. In most instructional settings, procrastination is treated as a behavioral lapse or a motivational deficiency. Teachers often encourage students to manage time better or to begin tasks earlier. However, such approaches rarely engage with the deeper cognitive-linguistic mechanisms that sustain procrastination. The internal dialogue of learners remains largely unexamined.

Students frequently engage in distorted self-talk that rationalizes delay. Statements such as "If I cannot write this perfectly, there is no point in starting" or "I always fail at speaking, so practice is useless" reflect clear patterns of distortion and generalization. These internal linguistic constructions create psychological barriers that reinforce avoidance. Without identifying and challenging these specific NLP Meta-Model patterns, instructional interventions remain surface-level and ineffective. There is therefore a critical need to investigate which ESL skills are most vulnerable to procrastination and to uncover the internal linguistic structures that maintain this cycle of delay.

**1.3 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

This study carries substantial significance for multiple stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. For ESL learners, it offers a framework for developing awareness of subconscious cognitive strategies that lead to habitual postponement. By recognizing their own patterns of deletion, distortion, and generalization, learners may begin to reframe their internal dialogue and regain a sense of agency over their academic behavior.

For educators, the study provides an alternative lens through which procrastination can be understood and addressed. When procrastination is viewed as a cognitive-linguistic phenomenon rather than a moral or behavioral failing, teachers are better positioned to design interventions that target thought patterns instead of merely penalizing delays. This shift has the potential to foster more empathetic and effective teaching practices.

For curriculum designers and academic planners, insights into skill-specific procrastination can inform the development of curricula that are psychologically supportive. Skills associated with higher anxiety, such as academic writing or oral communication, can be scaffolded more carefully to reduce avoidance and cognitive overload.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue between Applied Linguistics and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. By integrating NLP Meta-Model theory with established research on academic procrastination, the study offers a novel conceptual approach to understanding learner behavior within ESL contexts.

**1.4 Brief Review of Related Literature**

Academic procrastination has long been examined within the framework of self-regulation failure. Early foundational work by Solomon and Rothblum emphasized fear of failure, task aversiveness, and evaluation anxiety as central predictors of procrastinatory behavior. Their Procrastination Assessment Scale—Students remains one of the most widely used instruments for measuring academic delay and forms the quantitative backbone of the present study.

Historically, explanations of procrastination have oscillated between behavioral and cognitive perspectives. Behavioral models emphasize avoidance reinforcement, while cognitive theories, particularly those influenced by rational-emotive psychology, focus on irrational beliefs and maladaptive self-talk. These perspectives converge on the idea that procrastination is sustained by internal cognitive processes rather than external circumstances alone.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming, developed by Bandler and Grinder, introduced the Meta-Model as a set of linguistic tools designed to recover deleted information, challenge distortions, and specify vague generalizations in communication. Although NLP has been widely applied in therapeutic, coaching, and organizational settings, its systematic application within ESL academic contexts remains limited. Very few studies have attempted to analyze procrastination as a linguistic phenomenon shaped by internal language structures. This study responds to that gap by combining the diagnostic capacity of the PASS instrument with the explanatory power of NLP Meta-Model theory.

**1.5 Research Gap**

While a growing body of research has documented the prevalence of academic procrastination among Pakistani university students, and separate studies have explored the pedagogical potential of NLP techniques, there is a notable absence of research that integrates these two domains. No empirical investigation has yet focused on undergraduate ESL learners in the Hazara region through the specific analytical lens of NLP Meta-Model patterns. Existing studies largely remain descriptive, offering prevalence statistics without probing the cognitive-linguistic mechanisms that sustain procrastination. This research addresses that omission by providing an in-depth analysis of the habitual internal patterns that drive academic delay.

**1.6 Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the nature and extent of academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners in the Hazara region. It seeks to measure overall procrastination levels, identify the specific language skills that are most frequently postponed, and qualitatively analyze the underlying thought patterns using the NLP Meta-Model framework. Through this approach, the study aims to illuminate how procrastination is cognitively and linguistically constructed by learners.

**1.7 Research Questions**

This study is guided by two central research questions. First, what are the levels of academic procrastination associated with different language skills among undergraduate ESL learners at public universities in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? Second, which ESL language skills are most commonly procrastinated by these learners within the same institutional context?

**1.8 Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

The scope of the study is situated within the interdisciplinary domains of Applied Linguistics and Educational Psychology. It focuses exclusively on undergraduate ESL learners enrolled in public sector universities in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The investigation is limited to academic procrastination related to the four core ESL skills of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. The Solomon and Rothblum Procrastination Assessment Scale—Students is employed as the primary quantitative instrument. Qualitative analysis is confined to the three core categories of the NLP Meta-Model: Deletion, Distortion, and Generalization. Furthermore, the qualitative thematic analysis, conducted using Braun and Clarke's framework, is delimited to a purposive sample of thirty students.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Background**

Procrastination has occupied a central position in psychological inquiry for several decades, particularly within educational and academic contexts. It is most commonly conceptualized as the intentional postponement of necessary tasks despite the anticipation of negative consequences. Steel's widely cited definition frames procrastination as a self-regulatory failure rather than a mere organizational weakness, situating it within a broader motivational and cognitive framework. In academic environments, this phenomenon assumes a more complex form, referred to as academic procrastination, where delays are embedded within evaluative pressures, identity formation, and performance-related anxiety.

Early theorists such as Ellis and Knaus advanced the argument that procrastination is fundamentally rooted in irrational belief systems. According to their rational-emotive perspective, individuals procrastinate not because they lack time or skill, but because they hold maladaptive cognitions such as perfectionism, fear of failure, and low frustration tolerance. These beliefs generate emotional discomfort, which learners attempt to escape through avoidance. This view marked an important shift away from behavioral explanations toward cognitively oriented models that foreground internal dialogue and belief structures.

Running parallel to these developments, Neuro-Linguistic Programming introduced a constructivist understanding of human cognition and behavior. Developed by Bandler and Grinder, NLP is grounded in the premise that individuals do not interact directly with objective reality. Instead, they respond to internal representations of reality, commonly referred to as mental maps. These maps are linguistically and neurologically constructed and are shaped through experience, language, and perception. Central to NLP theory is the Meta-Model, which identifies three universal processes through which experience is filtered: Deletion, Distortion, and Generalization.

Deletion refers to the selective omission of information from conscious awareness. In academic procrastination, deletion often manifests when learners focus exclusively on the perceived difficulty of a task while excluding memories of prior success, available support, or partial competence. Distortion involves the alteration or exaggeration of experience. For instance, a routine academic assignment may be cognitively transformed into an overwhelming threat, or constructive feedback may be interpreted as personal rejection. Generalization occurs when a single experience is extended to define an entire category of self-evaluation. A solitary failure in writing may lead a learner to conclude that they are inherently incapable of writing in English, thereby reinforcing habitual avoidance.

The integration of procrastination theory with NLP provides a coherent explanatory model. From this perspective, academic procrastination in ESL contexts is not random or accidental. It is sustained by patterned linguistic representations that shape motivation, expectancy, and emotional response. The present study adopts this integrated view, proposing that procrastination among ESL learners is a learned, linguistically structured habit that can be systematically analyzed through the NLP

Meta-Model.

## 2.2    **Review of Related Studies**

### 2.2.1 **Procrastination in Academic Settings**

A substantial body of empirical research confirms that academic procrastination is both widespread and consequential. Solomon and Rothblum's seminal work identified fear of failure, task aversiveness, and evaluation anxiety as dominant predictors of procrastinatory behavior among university students. Their development of the Procrastination Assessment Scale—Students provided researchers with a reliable instrument to quantify both the frequency of procrastination and the underlying reasons for delay.

Subsequent research has expanded and refined this understanding. Steel's meta-analytic work synthesized findings from hundreds of studies and demonstrated that procrastination is strongly associated with low self-efficacy, impulsivity, and reduced expectancy of success. Contrary to popular belief, perfectionism alone was found to be a weak predictor unless accompanied by fear-based cognitions. This finding reinforces the view that procrastination is motivationally and cognitively driven rather than purely dispositional.

Further distinctions within procrastination research have been proposed. Schraw and colleagues differentiated between adaptive and maladaptive procrastination, suggesting that some learners delay strategically while maintaining performance. However, later studies challenged this distinction. Chu and Choi observed that even so-called active procrastinators experience elevated stress levels and emotional strain. These findings indicate that delay, regardless of intent, carries psychological costs.

Cross-cultural investigations add further depth to this literature. Klassen and colleagues demonstrated that while procrastination appears across cultures, its motivational antecedents differ. In collectivist contexts, concerns about social evaluation and relational harmony play a stronger role. Studies conducted in Turkey and other non-Western settings have shown that academic procrastination is closely linked to life satisfaction, emotional well-being, and academic irregularity, suggesting that its impact extends beyond classroom performance.

Research on self-regulation has further clarified these dynamics. Wolters found that students who actively regulate their motivation and employ cognitive strategies are less prone to procrastination. Similarly, Onwuegbuzie linked procrastination to statistics anxiety, highlighting how task-specific anxiety amplifies avoidance. These findings are particularly relevant for ESL contexts, where language anxiety functions in a comparable manner. Balkis and Duru reinforced this association by demonstrating that academic procrastination significantly predicts lower academic life satisfaction, underscoring its broader psychosocial implications.

### 2.2.2 **Procrastination in ESL and EFL Contexts**

Within language learning research, avoidance behaviors have long been recognized, although they were not initially labeled as procrastination. Horwitz and colleagues introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, identifying communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as central affective variables. These affective states often result in delayed engagement with language tasks, particularly those involving public performance.

More recent studies have explicitly framed these behaviors as procrastination.

Research in EFL settings indicates that learners frequently postpone writing and speaking tasks due to concerns about accuracy, fluency, and social judgment. Aydin demonstrated that fear of negative evaluation is a significant predictor of procrastination in language production tasks. Writing, in particular, emerges as a high-risk domain due to its permanence and evaluative nature.

Language learning is uniquely susceptible to procrastination because it directly engages personal identity and public self-presentation. Gilbert argued that unlike many academic subjects, language learning exposes cognitive limitations in real time, especially during speaking activities. This exposure intensifies threat perception and strengthens avoidance tendencies. In the Pakistani context, where English proficiency is tied to academic survival and social mobility, these pressures are further magnified. Empirical findings suggest that high-stakes evaluation environments exacerbate anxiety-driven procrastination among ESL learners, particularly at the undergraduate level.

#### **2.2.3 NLP Interventions in Education**

The application of Neuro-Linguistic Programming in educational settings has grown steadily, though it remains contested and underexplored in mainstream academic research. Tosey and Mathison conceptualized NLP as a phenomenology of learning, emphasizing its capacity to illuminate learners' subjective experiences. From this perspective, learning difficulties are not merely instructional failures but reflections of internal representational patterns.

Within English Language Teaching, scholars have highlighted the potential of NLP to reduce affective barriers. Millrood argued that reshaping learners' internal dialogue can lower affective filters and facilitate language acquisition. Dilts emphasized the role of belief systems, noting that limiting beliefs are linguistically encoded and therefore amenable to change through Meta-Model questioning.

Empirical studies provide tentative support for these claims. Kudliskis demonstrated improvements in student motivation and classroom engagement when NLP-informed strategies were employed. Pishghadam's research indicated that teachers trained in NLP principles were more effective in establishing rapport and reducing learner anxiety. More recent school-based studies have reported gains in spelling, attention regulation, and behavioral self-control following structured NLP interventions.

Despite these promising findings, NLP remains marginalized in formal academic research, often confined to coaching and professional development literature. Critics argue that its empirical base is insufficiently developed. However, the growing body of classroom-based studies suggests that NLP concepts warrant systematic investigation, particularly as analytical tools rather than prescriptive techniques.

#### **2.3 Research Gap**

Although extensive literature exists on academic procrastination and a growing body of work explores NLP in educational contexts, the intersection of these two domains remains largely unexplored. Most procrastination studies rely heavily on quantitative measurement and offer limited insight into the internal linguistic processes that sustain delay. Conversely, NLP research in education has primarily focused on teaching strategies and teacher effectiveness, rather than learner cognition

and self-regulatory failure.

Notably absent from the literature is any study that applies the NLP Meta-Model as an analytical lens to examine academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan. No empirical research has investigated how deletion, distortion, and generalization operate within learners' self-talk to justify avoidance, particularly in the Hazara region. This study addresses that gap by positioning NLP not as an instructional technique, but as a diagnostic framework for understanding the cognitive-linguistic architecture of procrastination.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study synthesizes Temporal Motivation Theory with the NLP Meta-Model to provide a comprehensive explanation of academic procrastination in ESL contexts. Temporal Motivation Theory conceptualizes motivation as a function of expectancy and task value, moderated by impulsiveness and temporal delay. From this perspective, procrastination occurs when learners perceive low chances of success, assign minimal value to tasks, or prioritize immediate emotional relief over long-term academic goals.

While Temporal Motivation Theory explains why procrastination occurs, it does not fully account for how learners cognitively justify their delay. This explanatory gap is addressed through the NLP Meta-Model. The Meta-Model provides a linguistic mechanism to analyze the internal dialogue through which learners rationalize low expectancy, diminished value, and habitual impulsiveness. Distortions such as mind reading and catastrophizing reinforce beliefs of inevitable failure. Deletions obscure long-term academic benefits and prior achievements. Generalizations transform isolated difficulties into stable self-identities of incompetence.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To address the objectives of this study, namely measuring academic procrastination levels and uncovering the underlying cognitive-linguistic patterns associated with procrastination, a mixed-methods research design was adopted. More specifically, the study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This design was selected because it allows quantitative and qualitative data to be collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and then integrated to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The quantitative component of the study focuses on measuring the extent and distribution of academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners. This dimension directly addresses the first two research questions by quantifying overall procrastination levels and identifying which language skills are most frequently delayed. However, numerical data alone cannot adequately explain why students procrastinate or how they internally justify their avoidance behaviors. For this reason, a qualitative component was incorporated.

The qualitative strand of the research explores students' subjective explanations for their procrastination. These explanations are not treated as incidental remarks but as linguistically structured representations of thought. Through thematic analysis guided by the NLP Meta-Model, these internal narratives are examined to

identify recurring patterns of deletion, distortion, and generalization. The integration of both strands enables the study to move beyond surface-level measurement and to conceptualize procrastination as a patterned, habitual cognitive process embedded in language.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of thirty undergraduate ESL learners enrolled in public sector universities located in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The sample size was deemed appropriate for an in-depth mixed-methods investigation, particularly for qualitative thematic analysis, where depth of data takes precedence over breadth.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. All selected participants were actively enrolled in undergraduate programs where English served as the primary medium of instruction and assessment. In addition, participants self-identified as experiencing difficulty with timely completion or submission of academic tasks, particularly those related to ESL skills.

The sample included both male and female students between the ages of 19 and 23, reflecting the typical age range of undergraduate learners in the region. The study was conducted within Departments of English at public universities, contexts in which academic English proficiency is not only a learning outcome but also a prerequisite for academic progression. This setting provided a natural and authentic environment for examining procrastination in relation to ESL learning demands.

### **3.3 Instruments**

The primary instrument used for data collection was the Procrastination Assessment Scale—Students, originally developed by Solomon and Rothblum. This instrument was selected due to its extensive validation and widespread use in academic procrastination research. For the purposes of the present study, the scale was adapted slightly to align more closely with ESL language skills while retaining its original structure and intent.

The first section of the instrument measures the frequency of procrastination across academic tasks. In this study, standard academic tasks were contextualized to reflect ESL-related activities. These included writing assignments such as essays and reports, reading tasks involving comprehension and academic texts, speaking-related preparation for presentations and group discussions, and listening tasks associated with audio-based comprehension exercises. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “never procrastinate” to “always procrastinate.” This section generated the quantitative data used to calculate overall procrastination levels and to rank language skills based on the degree of delay.

The second section of the PASS focuses on reasons for procrastination. While the original scale presents predefined categories, participants in this study were encouraged to elaborate on their reasons through open-ended responses. These written explanations constituted the qualitative dataset. Rather than being treated as simple self-reports, these responses were analyzed as linguistic expressions of underlying cognitive patterns, providing the foundation for NLP Meta-Model analysis.

### 3.4 Procedure

Data collection followed a structured and ethically informed procedure to ensure the reliability and integrity of the findings. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the relevant Departments of English at the participating universities. Ethical considerations were addressed in accordance with standard research protocols.

Participants were informed about the general purpose of the study, which was framed as an investigation into study habits and learning experiences. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would not influence their academic evaluation or grades. This assurance was intended to reduce response anxiety and encourage honest reporting.

The PASS questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting to maintain consistency and control over the data collection environment. Before distribution, the researcher provided a brief explanation clarifying the conceptual distinction between general delay and academic procrastination, emphasizing that procrastination involves delay accompanied by negative consequences. Participants were given approximately twenty minutes to complete the instrument. During this time, the researcher remained present to address any linguistic or procedural ambiguities.

Initially, thirty-five questionnaires were distributed. Following collection, responses were screened for completeness and coherence. Five questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses, resulting in a final dataset of thirty participants for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two distinct but complementary phases corresponding to the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

#### 3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the first section of the PASS were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to determine the overall level of academic procrastination among the participants. These measures provided an aggregate picture of the intensity and variability of procrastination within the sample.

In addition, mean scores for each ESL language skill were calculated separately. These scores were then ranked to identify the most frequently procrastinated skills. This analysis directly addressed the first and second research questions by establishing both the extent of procrastination and its distribution across reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks.

#### 3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data derived from participants' open-ended responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis. This approach was selected for its flexibility and rigor in identifying patterned meanings within textual data. Throughout the analysis, the NLP Meta-Model served as the guiding analytical lens.

The process began with familiarization, during which the researcher repeatedly read the responses to gain immersion and to note preliminary observations

regarding linguistic patterns. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying recurring expressions related to task difficulty, fear of evaluation, perceived incompetence, and avoidance.

In the third phase, these codes were organized into broader themes corresponding to the three Meta-Model categories. Statements reflecting vagueness or omission of specifics were classified under deletion. Exaggerated or imagined consequences were categorized as distortion. Recurrent absolute statements reflecting habitual beliefs were coded as generalization.

The fourth phase involved reviewing these themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and representativeness. Themes were refined where necessary to avoid overlap and to maintain conceptual clarity. In the fifth phase, themes were clearly defined and named, resulting in analytically meaningful constructs such as distorted perfectionism and generalized incompetence. The final phase involved selecting illustrative extracts that vividly demonstrated how these linguistic patterns functioned to sustain academic procrastination.

Through this integrated analytical process, the study systematically connected measurable procrastination behaviors with their underlying cognitive-linguistic structures, offering a comprehensive methodological approach to understanding academic procrastination among ESL learners.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from thirty undergraduate ESL learners enrolled in public universities in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research questions by systematically examining both numerical trends and underlying cognitive-linguistic patterns of academic procrastination.

The analysis is structured into two complementary sections. The first section reports the quantitative findings derived from the Procrastination Assessment Scale–Students, using descriptive statistics to establish overall procrastination levels and to identify the most procrastinated ESL language skills. The second section presents the qualitative findings, obtained through thematic analysis of students' open-ended responses, interpreted through the NLP Meta-Model framework of Deletion, Distortion, and Generalization. Together, these analyses offer an integrated and multidimensional understanding of procrastination as both a measurable behavior and a linguistically sustained habit.

### **4.2 Quantitative Analysis**

#### **4.2. Academic Procrastination Levels**

To address the first research question concerning overall academic procrastination levels, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated from the PASS scale, where higher scores indicate greater frequency of procrastination. A mean score above 3.0 reflects a high level of academic procrastination.

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Overall Academic Procrastination (N = 30)**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation	Level (SD)
Academic Procrastination	30	1.80	4.90	3.68	0.72	High

**Analysis**

The results presented in Table 4.1 indicate a high overall level of academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners. The mean score of 3.68 suggests that procrastination is not an occasional behavior but a recurrent academic habit. The relatively wide range between the minimum and maximum scores reflects variability in learners' self-regulatory capacity, with a small proportion managing academic demands more effectively. Nevertheless, the clustering of scores toward the higher end reinforces the argument that procrastination is a dominant feature of the ESL learning experience in this context.

**4.2.2 Procrastination Across ESL Language Skills**

To answer the second research question, procrastination scores were disaggregated by ESL language skill to determine which skills trigger the highest levels of avoidance.

**Table 4.2 Comparison of Procrastination Levels Across ESL Language Skills**

Rank	Language Skill	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	Writing	4.25	0.65	Very High
2	Speaking	3.80	0.78	High
3	Reading	3.10	0.90	Moderate
4	Listening	2.45	0.85	Low

**Analysis**

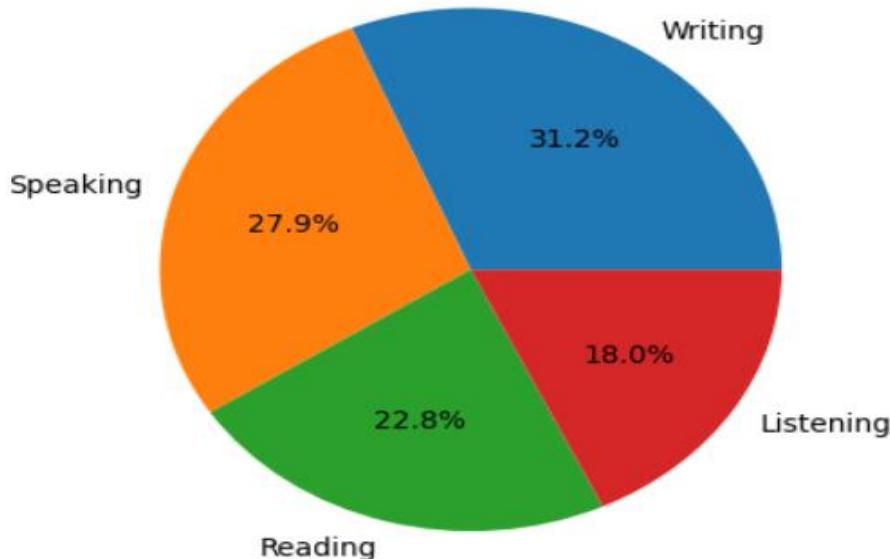
Table 4.2 reveals a clear and systematic pattern of skill-based procrastination. Writing emerges as the most procrastinated skill, with a mean score exceeding 4.0. This finding reflects the cognitively demanding and evaluative nature of academic writing in ESL contexts, where concerns about grammar, structure, and correctness are heightened. Speaking ranks second, suggesting that fear of public performance and negative evaluation significantly contributes to avoidance behavior.

Reading occupies a middle position, indicating moderate procrastination, possibly due to the cognitive load associated with dense academic texts. Listening is the least procrastinated skill, which may be attributed to its relatively passive nature and lower immediate demand for linguistic output. These findings underscore the skill-specific nature of procrastination rather than a generalized tendency to delay all academic tasks.

#### 4.2.3 Visual Representation of Skill-Based Procrastination

To enhance interpretability, a pie chart was generated to illustrate the proportional distribution of procrastination across ESL language skills.

**Figure 4.1** *Distribution of Procrastination Across ESL Language Skills*



The pie chart visually demonstrates that writing accounts for the largest proportion of procrastination, followed by speaking and reading, with listening contributing the smallest share. This visual distribution reinforces the statistical findings and highlights how procrastination is concentrated in productive language skills that involve evaluation, visibility, and personal exposure.

#### 4.3 Qualitative Analysis: NLP Meta-Model Patterns

The qualitative analysis focused on identifying recurring linguistic patterns in students' explanations for procrastination. Using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, responses were categorized according to the NLP Meta-Model.

**Table 4.3** *NLP Meta-Model Patterns Identified in Student Procrastination (N = 30)*

NLP Category	Detected Habitual Pattern	Frequency	Illustrative Student Expression
Distortion	Mind Reading (Fear of Evaluation)	18	"The teacher will criticize my grammar."
	Cause-Effect (External Blame)	12	"The topic makes me bored, so I can't start."
Generalization	Universal Quantifiers	15	"I always fail in grammar."
	Modal Operators of Necessity (Perfectionism)	10	"I must write perfectly."
Deletion	Simple Deletion	14	"Writing is just difficult."
	Comparative Deletion	8	"Listening is easier."

**Thematic Interpretation**

Distortion emerged as the most dominant pattern. Students frequently engaged in mind reading, predicting negative judgments from teachers and peers without evidence. This imagined evaluation transformed academic tasks into psychological threats, making procrastination appear rational rather than avoidant.

Generalization was particularly evident in writing-related tasks. Learners repeatedly framed isolated difficulties as permanent traits, using absolute language such as “always” and “never.” These linguistic patterns constructed rigid self-identities of failure, which justified delayed initiation.

Deletion functioned at a subtler level. Students often described tasks as “hard” or “difficult” without specifying the source of difficulty. This vagueness prevented problem-solving and allowed avoidance to persist. The absence of specificity rendered the task psychologically overwhelming and reinforced procrastination.

**4.4 Integrated Discussion of Results**

When quantitative and qualitative findings are examined together, a coherent picture emerges. High levels of procrastination are not evenly distributed across ESL skills but are concentrated in writing and speaking. These skills are sustained as avoidance zones through distorted predictions of failure, generalized beliefs of incompetence, and vague representations of difficulty. The students do not merely delay tasks; they linguistically reconstruct reality in ways that make delay feel necessary and justified.

**4.5 Summary of Findings**

The findings demonstrate that undergraduate ESL learners in the Hazara region exhibit high levels of academic procrastination. Writing is the most procrastinated skill, followed closely by speaking. This procrastination is not accidental or purely behavioral but is rooted in systematic cognitive-linguistic patterns identified through the NLP Meta-Model. Distortion, generalization, and deletion collectively sustain avoidance by shaping learners’ internal dialogue. These results strongly support the argument that academic procrastination is a linguistically structured habit that requires cognitive and linguistic intervention rather than simple time-management strategies.

**Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion****5.1 Discussion**

The present study set out to examine academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners in the Hazara region by moving beyond a simplistic understanding of delay as poor time management. Instead, procrastination was conceptualized as a habitual cognitive and linguistic pattern sustained through internal language structures. The integration of quantitative findings from the Procrastination Assessment Scale–Students (PASS) with qualitative insights derived from NLP Meta-Model analysis offers a layered and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. Together, these findings illuminate not only the extent of procrastination but also the internal mechanisms through which it is reproduced.

### **5.1.1 Interpretation of Procrastination Levels**

The quantitative results revealed a notably high mean procrastination score of 3.68, indicating that academic delay is widespread among the sampled ESL learners. This finding corroborates existing research, particularly Steel's (2007) meta-analytic work, which associates procrastination with diminished self-efficacy and heightened impulsiveness. However, the present study extends this interpretation by interrogating what impulsiveness actually represents at the cognitive level. The qualitative NLP analysis suggests that impulsive delay is not random behavior. It is a patterned response to academic anxiety. When learners experience anticipatory stress, they tend to linguistically "delete" future consequences and narrow their attention to immediate emotional relief. Avoidance, therefore, becomes an automatic coping strategy rather than a conscious choice.

### **5.1.2 The Burden of Writing Skills**

Among the four language skills examined, writing emerged as the most heavily procrastinated skill, with a mean score of 4.25, followed by speaking at 3.80. This pattern aligns closely with Aydin's (2017) findings, which link writing avoidance to fear of negative evaluation and perceived inadequacy. Writing tasks carry a unique psychological burden. They create a permanent textual record that exposes learners to scrutiny, unlike listening or speaking tasks, which are fleeting and often forgiven. The qualitative data provides critical insight into this avoidance. Learners frequently relied on Generalization patterns such as "I never write well" or "I always make mistakes." These absolute statements construct a deterministic narrative of failure. Within such a narrative, procrastination functions as a defensive delay mechanism, postponing an outcome the learner believes to be inevitable.

### **5.1.3 NLP Meta-Model Patterns as Habitual Cognitive Loops**

The thematic analysis revealed that Distortion, particularly in the form of mind-reading, was the most recurrent Meta-Model violation. Many students assumed negative teacher judgments before submitting their work. These imagined evaluations were treated as factual realities rather than speculative fears. This finding resonates with the cognitive-behavioral framework proposed by Ellis and Knaus (1977), which emphasizes the role of irrational beliefs in procrastination. However, the current study adds a linguistic dimension to this understanding. Students are not merely thinking irrationally; they are encoding those beliefs through language structures that make alternative interpretations inaccessible. Statements such as "The task is too hard" exemplify Deletion, where critical specifics are removed. What exactly is difficult remains undefined. As a result, the task becomes an unmanageable whole rather than a series of solvable components.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that academic procrastination among undergraduate ESL learners in the Hazara region is both prevalent and patterned, with writing tasks presenting the greatest challenge. More importantly, procrastination is shown to be a structured habit sustained through identifiable NLP Meta-Model violations. Distortion manifests as anticipatory anxiety about teacher evaluation. Generalization reinforces beliefs that past failures determine future outcomes. Deletion obscures actionable steps, leaving learners with an overwhelming sense of difficulty. Recognizing these

patterns shifts the academic discourse away from moral judgments about student behavior toward an understanding of procrastination as a modifiable cognitive habit. Time, in this sense, is not mismanaged. It is linguistically framed and psychologically negotiated.

### **5.3 Implications of the Study**

#### **5.3.1 Pedagogical Implications**

The findings carry clear pedagogical relevance. Educators can incorporate NLP-informed questioning strategies to interrupt maladaptive internal dialogue. When students express absolute statements such as "I cannot write," teachers can challenge the embedded Generalization by asking for specificity. This reframing reduces cognitive overload. Similarly, transparent assessment criteria and explicit rubrics can counteract mind-reading distortions by replacing imagined judgments with concrete expectations. Given the centrality of writing-related procrastination, instructional scaffolding becomes essential. Dividing writing tasks into smaller, clearly defined stages can neutralize the vagueness created by Deletion and restore a sense of control.

#### **5.3.2 Theoretical Implications**

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue between Applied Linguistics and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. It underscores that language learning extends beyond external linguistic competence. Internal language, or self-talk, plays a regulatory role in motivation, emotion, and academic behavior. By foregrounding this dimension, the study offers a framework for understanding procrastination as a linguistically mediated cognitive process rather than a personality flaw.

### **5.4 Limitations of the Study**

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The sample size of 30 participants restricts statistical generalizability. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, as students may underestimate their procrastination tendencies. Additionally, the regional focus on the Hazara area limits cultural transferability. Procrastination triggers may differ across educational and sociocultural contexts within Pakistan.

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