**Investigating the Effectiveness of SMART Goal Setting in Lowering Academic Procrastination and Improving Independent Study**

Academic procrastination is a major problem with over 70% of students chronically putting off aspects of their studies (Zacks & Hen, 2018). The consequences of academic procrastination are wide ranging with students reporting poor academic performance, course drop out, and poor mental health (Yang et al., 2020). To prevent and limit the negative effects of procrastination, many universities, colleges, and schools include study behaviour and time management classes in their curriculum. A popular technique taught to students is SMART goal setting, however, evidence for its effectiveness in reducing procrastination and improving study behaviours is limited. Therefore, the aim of this study was to clarify the effect SMART Goal setting has, if any, on academic procrastination and study behaviours in students.

The study had three phases taking over the course of two weeks. At the start of the study (T1) participants reported their levels of academic procrastination and their study behaviours in the week prior before setting an academic SMART goal for the week ahead. This was repeated one week later (T2). Finally, one week after T2 (T3), participants were asked their academic procrastination, their study behaviours, and their opinions and reflections on the study. A total of 5 undergraduate students aged 22-58 (mean age = 30.2, SD = 15.58) were recruited with 80% retention (n=4) at T2 and 40% retention (n=2) at T3.

Due to the small sample size, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to quantitative data and found no evidence of significant variation in procrastination scores found at any timepoint of the study. The results of this study therefore suggest that SMART goals do not reduce academic procrastination, regardless of singular or repeated use.

Similarly, no evidence of significant variation between any timepoints of the study for study behaviours. This suggests that SMART goals do not significantly influence study behaviours, with either singular or repeated use.

Thematic analysis of qualitative suggested that students utilise SMART goals primarily as a way of overcoming academic stress. Students in this sample seem to set SMART goals as a way to prompt action on tasks that are presently or will in the future cause distress. Accordingly, many of the participants’ goals described techniques of breaking down tasks to avoid overwhelm, such as, mini deadlines and task lists.

Integrated results from the mixed methods data suggest that students disengage from SMART goals quickly, doubting the efficacy of SMART goal setting or doubting their personal willpower to stop procrastinating in their studies, potentially explaining the lack of meaningful change in procrastination and study behaviours between SMART goal interventions.

Caution is advised in generalising the findings of this study due to the small sample size, however, results agree with those of Gustavson & Miyake (2017) who examined whether academic procrastination could be reduced by SMART goal interventions and were unable to see significant reductions in academic procrastination in students who set SMART goals.