

# The Relationship between Parental Perfectionism and Children's Academic Achievement

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**Abstract:** *Undoubtedly, perfectionism is one of the personality traits that can be both constructive, useful and positive, as well as neurotic and abnormal (negative). In other words, positive and negative perfectionism have different effects on individuals' personality and efficiency. When perfectionism is unhealthy and abnormal, it can lead to disorders such as obsession, depression, anorexia nervosa, personality disorders, anxiety disorders (social anxiety) and so on. And if perfectionism is used in a healthy way and to enhance personal and motivational abilities, it will lead to self-efficiency. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and children's academic achievement. The findings of the test and analysis of research hypotheses indicated that the effect of all independent variables on the dependent variable has been significant. Therefore all the research hypotheses were confirmed. Also, the effect of perfectionism on students' academic achievement and self-esteem has been more than other variables.*

**Keywords:** *Perfectionism; Academic Achievement; Efficiency; Self-esteem.*

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## 1. Statement of problem

Several factors affect a child's attitude toward himself and his family members, including economic, social, and cultural factors governing family that are directly related to the level of literacy and education of the family. Literacy and education, from an economic point of view, leads individuals towards community-based, creative, endogenous growth and development, and from a professional perspective, makes the society successful, adults are specified as a key factor in production, even with a specific economic term which are the active population or labor force. Perfectionist and power-seeking parents usually students who are over-perfectionist have had parents in the childhood who believed that the parents always said right, the parents always had right and acted right (Sanaei, 2013).

Perfectionism as a personality and motivational trait affects one's behavior. Horney (1950) considers perfectionism as a way of life that one uses to relieve anxiety. Although in the concept of perfectionism, it has allocated a great deal of attention of psychologists, it is still defined as an almost unknown and incompatible phenomenon (Bakhtiarpour, 2007). The construct of perfectionism can be normal or neurotic. Perfectionism is a threatening factor in the development of mental appetite and overeating. There is also evidence that perfectionism can prevent the successful treatment of depression and it is considered an important part of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (Zidi, 2013).

It can be stated that since these parents do not understand the difference between their abilities and their children, they try to punish the children to reach their own criteria. Criteria that is so unrealistic that they achieve rarely. This style is called power-seeking parenting style and provides the grounds for perfectionism in the child. Also, parents who are self-perfectionist not only consider their children's successes to be small, but even reject their own successes (Verner-Filion & Gaudrean, 2010).

Historically, the concept of perfectionism as a psychological category has been considered by many psychologists (Horney, 1950). Results show that perfectionists have parents with a high level of perfectionism (DiBartolo & Rendon, 2011). This relationship is especially strong when the parent and child are in the same gender. Perfectionist parents critic a lot, they are strict, and support their children less. They evaluate their children's performance too much; this is by the expense of losing the close relationship between them and their children. Perfectionist parents, instead of confirming their

children's behavior, constantly force them and warn them to do better (Pong, Johnston & Chen, 2010).

The children of perfectionists never feel happy because they think their behavior is not good enough to attract parents. Also, perfectionist parents often refrain from loving and endorsing their children, thus punish them and their children never feel satisfied or happy (Mirshekari and Saadatmand, 2015). Victims of such common fear try as much as they can to avoid situations that predict that their performance in those situations will be judged according to high standards and standards. On the other hand, the influence of perfectionism thinking on anxiety has been assessed by others that are the fundamental components of negative perfectionism associated with anxiety growth and states (Shaye, 2012). Given the importance of this issue in children's academic achievement and future success, this study is conducted to investigate the relationship between parental perfectionism and children's academic achievement.

## **2. Theoretical Framework of Research**

Perfectionism has been a favorite concept of psychologists since the early twentieth century. The first ones who worked on perfectionism defined it as: " The extremist tendency to be impeccable, to consider his or her own smallest mistake as an unforgivable sin and anxiously wait for the ominous consequences of failure ". In simpler terms, perfectionists consider too high criteria for success and if they fail to achieve their ambitious goals, they consider themselves as a defeated (Mehrabian et al., 2007). They know the world by the law of all or nothing. Every possible outcome is either a complete failure or a complete success. In sport, this phenomenon is clearly visible to athletes after the race. Those who consider equality as a failure and have nothing to do with other factors are likely to be perfectionists. If we consider the perfectionist athletes before the race, we are most likely to be preoccupied with the fear of failure. (Fakhr al-Sadat, 2003)

In general, fear of failure, concern of evaluating and how others think about themselves, formulating high-level standards, and not assuring their success, and the thoughts like this that perfectionists are engaged with them, are all considered the underlying and manifestation of anxiety. In other words, every human being has a set of abilities and by aware of the amount of these talents that determine his or her life goals (Bakhtiarpour, 2007). It is assumed that perfectionists have cognitive schemas that, regardless of their abilities, choose goals beyond their capacity and as afraid

of failing to attain their considered perfection, except for complete success, they are not satisfied with anything (Bakhtiarpour, 2007).

Perfectionist thinking, on the one hand, alone leads to academic failure because perfectionist students are not satisfied with just doing their homework and achieving 100% good results. They are not satisfied with this issue that their performance is better than their peers and they have done their work or assignment as desirable and acceptable as possible, but they are only fully satisfied if they complete the task or assignment completely and without any error. For this purpose, they may abandon their responsibilities in any way due to the fear of lack of achieving their purpose. And for this reason, they will have the academic failure and on the other hand, perfectionism may indirectly lead to academic failure by depression and anxiety (Besharat, 2004). In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the importance of this concept for its traumatic role was again emphasized (Heidari & Kushan, 2002). Until this time, the concept of perfectionism was a one-dimensional concept and no attention was paid to its interpersonal features, but by the end of the twentieth century, perfectionism was exited the one-dimensional state and proposed as a multidimensional construct (Besharat, 2004). Various factors such as anxiety, extreme responsibility, inflexibility, depression, fear of self-efficacy, self-esteem and so on are effective.

### ***2.1 Perfectionism***

Perfectionism is defined as the individual's enduring tendency to set complete and unattainable criteria and to strive for their fulfillment with self-critical evaluation of the personal performance. Perfectionism in psychology is the belief that all things must be done in an obsessive manner and not accepted otherwise (Zidi, 2013). From a pathological point of view, perfectionism is an obsessive-compulsive personality disorder in which if the performance or outcome of an action is less than perfection, it is not accepted by the person. In such cases, these beliefs are unhealthy, and psychologists refer to such individuals as abnormal perfectionists (Accordino, Accordino & Slaney, 2000).

Perfectionists constantly think about the consequences of their actions and always focus on the best; they always expect to do the best. But they can never finish their work well. Such people have high expectations of their actual performance, so they cannot feel good because such personal and extreme criteria are the fear of failure. Fear leads to avoidance behaviors. And avoidance behavior means that one must constantly be

aware of frightening issues. Fear of failure may prompt components of perfectionism such as safety seeking, reforming others, and extreme investigation to the person to be achieved their irrational criteria (Pong, Johnston & Chen, 2010).

Perfectionists avoid situations for fear of not fulfilling perfectionist criteria and may be neglected. Hollander (1965) focused on cognitive processes that sustain perfectionism in the individual, such as selective attention i.e, perfectionists often focus on their mistakes and deficiencies, Hollander considers perfectionism a negative trait, and the perfectionist has a self-humiliation.

Adler considers the view of striving for excellence as the basic reality of life. Excellence is the ultimate goal striving for it. The purpose of striving for excellence is not striving for being better or selfish tendency or false belief to situations. The purpose of Adler was the concept of striving for the concept of perfection. According to Bronse, perfectionism is the source of interaction with parents and perfectionists because it is within such a relationship that the child is positively reinforced for excellent performance. However, when the child fails in the effort, the parents consider failure as a reflection of backwardness of their skill. Instead of reassuring and comforting their children, such parents treat them with frustration, anxiety, and confusion (Zidi, 2013). Burns (1980) examined the continuous evaluation of perfectionists in successes. He observed that perfectionists have unrealistic extremist and inflexible criteria and that their interpretation of events is a destructive style and they define themselves on the basis of the ability to attain goals.

Undoubtedly, perfectionism is one of the personality traits that can be constructive, useful and positive, as well as neurotic, and abnormal (negative), and each category has different effects on one's personality and performance. On the whole, it can be said that the perfectionist is a person who needs and desires to be perfect, such a person assumes himself exactly as the ideal image of himself, the thing that "must" be ideal in his verdict (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015).

## ***2.2 Academic achievement***

Academic achievement means that the expected educational level to be met and the education organization to be closer to its predetermined goals. Academic achievement means increasing learning, increasing the grade of scores, and students' acceptance in the courses and educational grades. Academic achievement is "general or private knowledge or acquired skill in

subjects that typically measure tests or marks, or both, that teachers or students set." The term academic achievement refers to the manifestation of a student's academic status (Sanaei, 2013).

Cases like the school principal, the teacher, the goals and content of the curriculum, the methods and the educational facilities can be considered among factors, generally, give set of expectations to students that can play a significant role in the academic success or non-success of students. (Sanaei, 2013).

Emotional conditions in the family are the most important factors in shaping students' attitudes towards education, mainly the cultural poverty of some families due to their parents' illiteracy causes to not to pay attention to the children. On the other hand, in some high-level families with relatively good education, the dominant atmosphere in the family is such that science and education are more valued. It is expected from children to pass high levels of science, and sometimes the pressure on children to be good and meet expectations may be greater than their ability and capacity, and the imbalance between expectations and abilities can lead to many problems in students (Sanaei, 2013).

### ***2.3 Impact of Perfectionism on Academic Achievement***

Human beings naturally wishes goodness and perfection, and this tendency toward perfectionism and humanity is almost incomplete and flawless. The defect is that the category of perfectionism becomes anomalous because the unhealthy dimensions of perfectionism are associated with a lack of self-esteem, neuroticism and little harms (Shaye, 2012). In fact, perfectionism is not necessarily recognized as a negative factor, but as a factor that can have a positive and beneficial function. The life of perfectionists is usually summed up in a series of dos and don'ts. They should reach perfection in every way and do their best, otherwise they will not be satisfied, and their failure to fulfill them will cause them anxiety, depression, and severe guilt (Zidi, 2013). These expectations, on the other hand, make it difficult for them to undertake hard and irrational responsibilities of life. Some perfectionist parents wish to have perfect children. They are usually too ambitious, too competitive and too serious for their mistakes. This group of fathers and mothers do what they can to train perfect children. They regularly encourage their children to learn music or sports, of course, just learning and proficiency is not enough, but also their children should be beyond it (Pong et al., 2010). Perfectionist parents fill every moment of their children's lives with lessons, programs, and extracurricular activities, they expect from their children to have great scores

and they put constantly their children under pressure to choose activities and programs that are according to their desire, not what the children themselves desire. These improper pressures and perfectionism will end up for the children and what kind of personality they will find in adulthood. Research has shown that positive forms of perfectionism are positively associated with life satisfaction. In addition, the negative forms of perfectionism have been negatively correlated with a variety of concepts of subjective well-being (Gilman & Ashby, 2004).

Concerning satisfaction from education, everyone expects the school and teachers to use the utmost facilities and efforts to students to reach the preset goals, but the point is that each student enters the educational environment by a unique background. The most important shaping of any student's background is the family environment and relationship with parents (Gilman & Ashby, 2004). One of the major problems that parents usually face is their lack of awareness of how to use appropriate educational styles for their children. If parents know that their educational styles determine the mental health fundamentals and educational and social competencies of their children, they will surely try more in learning and adopting appropriate educational styles. The purpose of educational styles of parenting are methods used by parents to deal with their children and have a profound impact on their childhood development and personality traits and subsequent behavior (Diba & Morteza, 2004).

Perhaps if people accepted that their defects were considered part of their beauty, it was this contradiction that made them unique and lovely. Many psychological problems did not happen. Perfectionism, as a personality and motivational attribute, affects one's behavior (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015). In general, fear of failure, fear of being evaluated and how others think about themselves, formulating high standards and not assuring their success, and the thoughts that perfectionists have been engaged with them. All are the underlying and manifestation of anxiety (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015). In other words, every human being has a set of abilities and by aware of the amount of these talents determine his or her life goals.

It is assumed that perfectionist individuals have cognitive schemas that, regardless of their abilities, choose goals beyond their capacity and are afraid of failing to achieve their considered perfection, except for complete success; they are not satisfied to a thing. Having perfectionist thinking on the one hand, alone leads to academic decline because perfectionist students are not satisfied with just doing their homework and getting good results.

They are not satisfied with this issue that their performance is better than their peers or they have done the assignment well and acceptable, but their satisfaction is fully provided only when they do their assignment completely without any error. So they may not be responsible for fear of failing to achieve their goal, or abandon them in the middle of work and therefore they will have educational decline (Sanaei, 2013).

The motivational force of each individual is towards growth and flourishing that self-efficacy is considered an important element in this way. The natural tendency of people is to move from the path of realizing their potential, although they may face some environmental and social barriers. Self-efficacy is a lasting and clear emotion from one's ability to cope effectively with many stressful situations. Self-efficacy refers to a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, a sense of self-sufficiency and efficiency in dealing with life (Bakhtiarpour, 2007). Also, self-esteem is what we think about ourselves, characteristics of ourselves that we compare with others, and our ability to reach an acceptable result on important issues (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015).

Self-esteem is one of the most important characteristics of any person and it affects his mental health. Self-esteem also affects other personal aspects of a person, and lack of self-esteem will cause other aspects of their personality not to be grown or become inharmonic, and it may even underlie various mental illnesses such as depression, timidity and aggression. So self-esteem is at the heart of the matter. Those who fail to achieve their goals or see negative features in themselves and consider themselves unattractive have less self-esteem than successful and attractive people (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015).

In other words, positive and negative perfectionism have different effects on one's personality and efficiency. When perfectionism is unhealthy and abnormal, it can cause disorders such as obsession, depression, anorexia nervosa, personality disorders, anxiety disorders (social anxiety), stress, psychiatric disorders and migraines. Perfectionists are often depressed because their focus is on issues such as individual competency and self-criticism. They blame, criticize and attack, and have strong feelings of guilt, shame, defeat, and dishonesty (Pong et al., 2010). Perfectionist students do more risk and consider more advancement. In a way, they are never satisfied with their work and refrain from competitions even if they are confident of their ability (Mirshekari & Saadatmand, 2015).

Ultimately, this issue can lead to some disadvantages in the children's healthy education process, which can have long-term effects on academic failure, lack of interest in education, or obsession in gaining score from student. Given the content and scope of the effects of positive and negative (abnormal) perfectionism, the hypotheses of this study can be proposed as follows:

First hypothesis: Maladaptive perfectionism (negative) of parents affects students' academic achievement.

First sub-hypothesis: Maladaptive perfectionism (negative) of parents affects students' anxiety.

Second sub-hypothesis: Maladaptive perfectionism (negative) of parents affects students' fear of endangering.

Third sub-hypothesis: Maladaptive perfectionism (negative) of parents affects students' depression.

Second hypothesis: Positive perfectionism of parents affects students' academic achievement.

Fourth sub-hypothesis: Positive perfectionism of parents affects students' self-efficacy.

Fifth sub-hypothesis: Positive perfectionism of parents affects students' self-esteem.

### **3. Research Method**

This study is applied objectively and in terms of data collection is non-experimental designs. To ensure content validity, the research indices for the considered structures were designed based on previous studies and according to experts and university professors. A 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used for all analytical questions in the questionnaire. The statistical population of this study consisted of 196 undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University of Science Research Branch in Tehran. This value was obtained according to Cochran's formula for the finite sample population (confidence coefficient 95% and error percentage 0.05). In order to lack valid data, (210) questionnaires were distributed among the sample population. After the survey, the correct questionnaire was extracted. The data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed by SPSS software. The data obtained from the analytical questions of the questionnaire were analyzed in order to investigate the research hypotheses according to the multivariate regression and the relationships among the main variables of the research were identified. Also, the primary tool for data collection in this study was questionnaire. Also, the research

questionnaire consisted of two parts, which in the first part, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were investigated. In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the indicators on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire used included two categories of perfectionism questions and academic achievement.

The second part included 28 questions about examining research hypotheses. In this study, face validity was used by experts to evaluate the validity of the measurement instrument (questionnaire) and the reliability of factors in the structural model was estimated by Cronbach's alpha formula. The reliability coefficients obtained using this formula indicated the reliability of the questionnaires was high (0.954).

#### 4. Analysis

An aspect of statistics is called inferential, which includes statistical estimation techniques and hypothesis testing. In which way (estimation or test) is deduced depends on the type of research. In this section, we examine the data obtained from the research questionnaires according to the various research variables described in the previous sections. In this study, we use the K-S (Kolmogorof Smirinov) statistic to test the assumption of normality of observations. The result of this test is summarized in the following table by separating groups.

<b>Table 1:</b> Result of Kolmogorof Smirinov test		
Statistic K-S	Sig.2-taild significance	Variable
1.33	0.06	Negative perfectionism
1.19	0.09	Positive perfectionism
1.23	0.08	Academic achievement
1.33	0.08	Anxiety
1.34	0.06	Fear of endangering
1.35	0.09	Depression
1.33	0.06	Self-efficiency
1.25	0.07	Self-esteem

As it can be seen, all statistics are above 0.05 and the assumption of normality is confirmed. In the next part of the research, the research hypotheses are tested using regression analysis. Multivariate regression is one

of the bases of data analysis and reveals the relationships between statistical data.

<b>Table 2.</b> Results of the research hypotheses			
Result	Significant level	Beta coefficient	Hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.333	The first main hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.460	The first sub-hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.194	The second sub-hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.275	The third sub-hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.560	The second main hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.442	The fourth sub-hypothesis
Confirmed	0.000	0.541	The fifth sub-hypothesis

As it can be seen in the table above, the level of significance obtained indicates a significant relationship between the variables. Thus, the null hypothesis for all research hypotheses is rejected and these hypotheses are confirmed. Also, the effect of perfectionism on students' academic achievement and self-esteem has been more than other variables.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Perhaps if people accepted that their defects were considered part of their beauty, it was this contradiction that made them unique and lovely. Many psychological problems did not happen. Perfectionism, as a personality and motivational attribute, affects one's behavior. Horney (1950) considers perfectionism as a way of life that one uses to relieve anxiety. Although in the concept of perfectionism, it has allocated a great deal of attention of psychologists, it is still defined as an almost unknown and incompatible phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and children's academic achievement. The findings of the test and analysis of research hypotheses indicated that

the effect of all independent variables on the dependent variable was significant. Therefore all the research hypotheses were confirmed. Also, the effect of perfectionism on students' academic achievement and self-esteem was more than other variables.

Undoubtedly, perfectionism is one of the personality traits that can be constructive, useful and positive, as well as neurotic and abnormal (negative). In other words, positive and negative perfectionism have different effects on individuals' personality and efficiency. Also, when perfectionism is unhealthy and abnormal, it can lead to disorders such as obsession, depression, anorexia nervosa, personality disorders, anxiety disorders (social anxiety), stress, mental disorders and migraine, and if perfectionism is used healthy and to enhance one's personal and motivational abilities, it leads to self-efficacy. And this self-efficacy is a sustained and clear sense from competency and capability of person to cope effectively with many stressful situations and is associated with self-esteem and self-worth and enhances them. Findings from previous research also indicate that positive forms of perfectionism are positively associated with life satisfaction. In addition, the negative forms of perfectionism have been negatively correlated with a variety of concepts of subjective well-being.

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