

In the
Name of
God



Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University

Faculty of Humanities

**On the Relationship among Self-efficacy,
Perfectionism and English Achievement among
Iranian EFL Learners**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship among self-efficacy, perfectionism and English language achievement among third grade high school students in northern part of Tehran. A sample of 400 female students was assessed for their levels of self-efficacy and perfectionism using *Foreign Language Learning Self-efficacy scale (SEQ)* and *The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R)*, respectively. Participants' scores on their final English test were also used as the measurement of their English achievement. The results revealed strong correlations between learners' self-efficacy and English achievement ($r = .303, p < 0.01$). It meant that the respondents with higher foreign language self-efficacy were likely to have higher English scores. Also, perfectionism was found to be negatively correlated with English achievement ($r = -.064, p < .01$). However, the results of Model summary and ANOVA shed the light on the issue that there is not any relationship among learners' self-efficacy and English language achievement as mediated by perfectionism.

Key Words:

Self-efficacy, Perfectionism, English Achievement

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	I
Table of Contents.....	II
List of Tables.....	III

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Overview.....	2
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3. Significance of the Study.....	5
1.4. Research Questions.....	6
1.5. Research Hypotheses.....	6
1.6. Definition of Key Terms.....	7
1.7. Limitations of the Study.....	8

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

2.1. Overview.....	11
2.2. Self-efficacy.....	11
2.2.1. Sources of Self-efficacy.....	13
2.2.2. Factors Affecting Self-efficacy.....	15
2.2.3. Effects of self-efficacy.....	16
2.2.4. Dimensions of self-efficacy.....	17
2.2.5 Application of self-efficacy.....	18
2.2.6 Academic Self-Efficacy and Attainment.....	20
2.2.7 Self-efficacy and English Achievement.....	23
2.2.8 Self-efficacy and English Achievement in Iran.....	28
2.3 Perfectionism.....	31
2.3.1 Classification of Perfectionism.....	32

2.3.2 Perfectionism and Achievement/ English Achievement.....	41
2.3.3 Perfectionism and English Achievement in Iran.....	43
2.3.4 Perfectionism and Self-Efficacy.....	46

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Overview.....	51
3.2. Participants.....	51
3.3. Instruments.....	52
3.3.1 Foreign Language Learners’ Self-efficacy Scale for Iranian Students (SEQ).....	53
3.3.2 The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R).....	55
3.3.3. English Language Achievement Test.....	56
3.3.4. The Background Questionnaire.....	57
3.4.Procedure.....	57
3.5.Research Design.....	58
3.6.Data Analysis.....	58

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

4.1.Overview.....	61
4.2. Descriptive Statistics.....	61
4.3.Research Question One.....	62
4.4.Research Question Two.....	65
4.5. Research Question Three.....	68

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

5.1. Overview.....	73
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5.2. Conclusions.....	73
5.3. Pedagogical Implications.....	74
5.4. Suggestions for Further Research.....	75

References.....	77
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Appendices

Appendix A: Foreign Language Learners' Self-efficacy scale for Iranian Students (SEQ) (English Version)	89
Appendix B: The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) (English Version).....	93
Appendix C: Research Questionnaires (Persian Version).....	95
Appendix D: Third Grade English Final Exam.....	99
Appendix E: Frequencies and Percentages of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations of the SEQ ..	104
Appendix F: Frequencies and Percentages of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations of the APS-R ..	109

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Classification of Multidimensional Perfectionism.....	36
Table 3.1 Participants.....	51
Table 3.2 Cronbach Alpha Indexes for 2 Factors of SEQ Identified.....	54
Table 3.3 Cronbach Alpha Indexes for 3 Factors of APS-R Identified.....	56
Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for Self-efficacy and its factors.....	61
Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics for perfectionism and its factors.....	62
Table 4.3. Correlation between Self-efficacy and English Achievement.....	62
Table 4.4. Correlation between perfectionism and English Achievement	66
Table 4.5. Model Summary.....	69
Table 4.6. ANOVA.....	69
Table 4.7. Coefficients.....	70

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Overview

The prediction of individual differences in academic achievements is a vital key in educational psychology. Several studies (Rothstein, Paunonen, Rush, & King, 1994) have investigated the relationship between personality traits and academic outcomes; research in this area has proved the positive association between personality traits and academic achievement.

Self-efficacy is one of the important personality constructs. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p.391) and is considered to be the central element in the Social Cognitive Theory. Since Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy in 1977, the role of self-efficacy in learning has been investigated by many educational researchers (Huang & Chang, 1996; Linnenbrick & Pintrich, 2003; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007; Pajares, 2002a; Schunk & Pajares, 2001). These studies revolved around one concept and all emphasized that self-efficacy is an indispensable part of learning and a good predictor for the success of the learner.

This study also responded to this call for further research on the concept of perfectionism. To develop a greater understanding of this multifaceted construct, various researchers have provided multidimensional definitions of perfectionism covering its many qualities. For instance, Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) described six

components of perfectionism: high standards, concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, perception of parental expectations, perception of parental criticism, and emphasis on order and organization. Hewitt and Flett's (1991) definition of perfectionism focused on the interpersonal aspects of the construct and identified three dimensions, which they labeled self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Hamachek (1978) distinguished between normal perfectionists and neurotic perfectionists, both types who hold high standards for themselves but differ in their focus and approach to tasks. Based on their clinical experience, treating perfectionistic clients, Johnson and Slaney (1996) conceived of perfectionism as a construct involving high personal standards, a sense of order and organization, and discrepancy between one's standards and actual performance. These latter conceptualizations of perfectionism emphasize the positive aspects of perfectionism as in addition to its less desirable qualities.

Scarcity of studies and explicit lack of research on the concept of perfectionism in the context of language learning in Iran prompted the researcher to conduct the present study aiming at investigating the effects perfectionism might have on learning English as a foreign language among Iranian high school students.

Also, perfectionism and self-efficacy beliefs of the learner are both influential factors that contribute to the learning process and the success of the students. The scarcity of body of literature related to perfectionism is another reason why the researcher has been intrigued to include this concept in the present study to see its role on the relationship between language learner self-efficacy and English achievement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Recent interest in the field of foreign language learning has focused on research topics related to individual differences and personality factors. The purpose of individual differences namely anxiety, risk-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, empathy, self-esteem, and inhibition is to *predict* which learners would succeed or may face failure (Ellis, 1994). Children learn their mother tongue implicitly and within a short period of time, achieve full competence, but second/foreign language learners vary in the speed of acquisition and some may succeed or not; accordingly, a few may reach native-like proficiency (Ellis, 1994). Therefore, it is necessary to find out the factors, which may hinder or negatively affect language learning. Among these factors which have not been paid due attention to in academic setting are learner self-efficacy and perfectionism.

The theory accounting for this study is social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986). Social cognitive theory (SCT) emphasizes people's cognitive and affective reactions to performance results are influenced by goals as goals determine the necessities of success. Self-efficacy, as one of the indispensable components of social cognitive theory, is defined by Bandura (1996) as “beliefs in one’s capability to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 392). Regarding the concept of perfectionism, perfectionism is a kind of strive for reaching perfection. Perfectionist people like to meet high standards in every aspect of their lives, be it in school, workplace, cooking, etc; they are afraid of making mistakes, and cannot bear failure and if they face failure, they become truly depressed (Hollender, 1965 as cited in Pishghadam and Akhondpoor, 2011).

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there have been very few studies in Iran having investigated the role of learner self-efficacy, perfectionism, and their English performance. Thus, there is a need for continued research regarding the use of extensive these factors to enable practicing teachers to improve results for their students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among language learners' self-efficacy, perfectionism and their English achievement.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study provides useful information for researchers, educators, teachers, and students. This study was conducted in the context of high schools in northern part of Tehran and investigated the extent of learner self-efficacy and perfectionism among Iranian senior high school students.

The findings of this study provide more insights into the constructs that may be associated with the development of second and foreign language learning. Second and foreign language teachers and students may benefit from the results of this study. Although this study makes no claims of generalizability, other second and foreign language programs, teachers, and learners may recognize similarities between the participants of this study and their own students and take into consideration its findings and recommendations.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between third-grade high school students' self-efficacy and their English achievement?
2. Is there any significant relationship between third-grade high school students' perfectionism and their English achievement?
3. Is there any significant relationship between third-grade high school students' self-efficacy and their English achievement as mediated by perfectionism?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Three research questions of the current study can be arranged in the following research hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between third-grade high school students' self-efficacy and their English achievement.
2. There is no significant relationship between third-grade high school students' perfectionism and their English achievement.
3. There is no significant relationship between third-grade high school students' self-efficacy and their English achievement as mediated by perfectionism.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Self-efficacy

*Theoretical definition: Bandura (1997a) defined it as the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p.3).

*Operational definition: Sadighi, Alavi, and Samani developed a measurement to rate foreign language learning self-efficacy for Iranian students (2004). They developed the questionnaire according to Bachman’s (1990) components of organizational language competence. In this study, self-efficacy is a construct, which involve two components: grammatical components and textual components.

Perfectionism:

*Theoretical definition: In general, perfectionism is defined as a personality trait involving holding unrealistically high standards, striving to reach these impossible goals, and defining one’s worth by the accomplishment of these standards with relentless self-criticism (Bieling, Israeli, Smith, & Anthony, 2003; Blatt, 1995; Pacht, 1984).

*Operational definition: In this study, perfectionism is considered a multidimensional construct and involves three components: high personal standards, order or organization and discrepancy (defined as the perceived difference between one’s standards and expectations and one’s actual performance). According to this view of perfectionism, high standards and order represent the more adaptive aspects of perfectionism, whereas discrepancy is the defining aspect of maladaptive perfectionism (Slaney et al, 2001).

Language Achievement:

*Theoretical definition: The concept of academic achievement refers to the achievement by individuals of objectives related to various types of knowledge and skills. These objectives are socially established based on the age, prior learning, and capacity of individuals with regard to education, socialization, and qualification. Studies conducted on academic achievement notably focus on student progress and individual, institutional and organizational factors of achievement, along with social relationship interactions that determine, facilitate or hinder academic achievement. (Crires, 2005; as cited in International Observatory on Academic Achievement, 2009).

*Operational definition: In the present study, English achievement refers to the students' scores on their final English exam, which is held nationwide. The final grade was selected mainly because it has been used as a global measure of language.

1.7 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Like any other studies, a few limitations of this are as follow:

- a) This study used a survey where students were supposed to answer two sets of questionnaires designed to measure their levels of second language self-efficacy and perfectionism. Surveys were conducted at a time remote from the language task, a fact that may raise some skepticism as to their claim to truth.
- b) Self-efficacy and perfectionism being an internal attribute are difficult to isolate and study exhaustively by means of some objective instruments. Some participants may inflate or underestimate their self-efficacy/perfectionism levels.

This study is delimited to:

- a) This study was carried out with third-grade high school students in the northern part of Tehran; the reason cited for the choice of the location is only due to convenience.
- b) The sample of this research included only female students, because researcher could not have the admission to distribute the questionnaires at boys' schools.
- c) Only third-grade high school students/ juniors were chosen because of the sameness of the final exam among all the high schools that is held throughout the country; in other words, their final English test was selected mainly because it has been used as a nationwide measure of language proficiency.

In spite of these limitations, the researcher adheres to the idea that this study should provide some helpful insights for educators, teachers and students as how influential such personal variables as learner self-efficacy and perfectionism will be on learners' English achievement.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature