

Impact of Perfectionistic Concerns, Strivings and Organizational Standards on Academic Excellence

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Abstract

A high correlation between personal standards and grades signifies a strong relation between an individual's expectations and academic performance. When personal standards are elevated, individuals tend to be ambitious, demonstrating a commitment to excellence and striving for success in their academics. This correlation suggests that individuals with high personal standards are likely to invest considerable effort and dedication into their studies, seeking to achieve academic excellence and personal growth. It also implies that these high personal standards act as a motivational factor, propelling individuals to strive for academic success consistently. This correlation may have positive implications on personal and professional development, as individuals with high personal standards are likely to carry this commitment to excellence into their future endeavours.

Introduction

Perfectionism is a behaviour often associated with the constant need to strive for excellence or flawlessness, accompanied by immoderately high standards and excessively self-critical analysis of one's own behaviour. Some studies tend to suggest that perfectionism also tends to be an underlying cause for mental illnesses born of a perceived inadequacy, such as anxiety, depression, and OCD; due to one's inability to meet perceived standards leading to disappointment in oneself, and therefore, low self-esteem. It also appears to have a negative implication in the workplace- as proven by a study conducted by Julian H. Childs & Joachim Stoeber (2012), concluding that perfectionism is an issue in the workplace that often hampers progress, instead of facilitating actual growth.

Therefore, across history, researchers find it difficult to conceive perfectionism as an asset to an individual, instead believing it to be a behavioural trait that causes stress and self-doubt. More recent studies however, inspired by Hamachek (1978) on the other hand, tend to categorize perfectionism as 'normal'- with relatively attainable standards, and 'neurotic'- with more extreme standards that are a challenge to relax. Various other studies have concluded similar segregation, such as (Adkins & Parker, 1996, (active and passive perfectionism), (Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995 (positive and negative perfectionism), (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998 (adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism), (Rhéaume, Freeston, et al., 2000 (functional and dysfunctional perfectionism, (Stumpf & Parker, 2000 (healthy and unhealthy perfectionism), etc.

This segregation is clearly defined in a study conducted by Stoeber, Joachim, and Otto, Kathleen (2006), in which conceptions of perfectionistic behaviour were further investigated, and divided into 'Perfectionist

concerns' and 'Perfectionistic Strivings'. Specifically, it concluded that perfectionistic concerns demonstrated a higher correlation with psychological maladjustment, often equating to a lack of self-worth. Perfectionistic behaviours that do not have repercussions on one's self-worth were categorized as 'perfectionistic strivings' and found to be a sign of a completely natural desire to succeed in life, an inadvertent result of high levels of ambition. (Flett, Gordon L., et al (1994)) also discusses the relationship between such Perfectionist Strivings and Type A Personality types, (first described by Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman) that tend to be highly ambitious, competitive- with self-worth highly reliant on a sense of achievement or accomplishment. Hence, academic excellence, which is also often seen as linked to ambition, and a desire for personal success to meet individual and social expectations (Kriegbaum, K., Becker, N. & Spinath, B. (2018)) could also be potentially reliant on perfectionism.

Prior research conducted in the field has discovered (to an extent) a positive correlation between perfectionism and academic excellence. Stoeber, Damian, & Madigan, 2018, for example, hypothesized that high levels of perfectionism would result in higher standards for oneself, resulting in behaviour favourable for obtaining academic excellence, by providing greater motivation to achieve self-imposed objectives or standards. Kljajic et al, 2017, further explores the multifaceted nature of perfectionistic tendencies and their individual influence on academic performance, with Socially prescribed perfectionistic concerns (or intrusive worries or concerns regarding one's performance) often actively impairing one's ability to attain academic goals regardless of the efforts or motivation of the individual, while self-oriented perfectionistic standards, in contrast, have a more definite and prevalent positive effect on one's academic performance.

Hence, when investigating the effects of perfectionism on academic performance, we hypothesized that a high level of perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns would coincide with an elevated level of academic achievement or excellence amongst high school students.

Method

Perfectionism

In order to gauge the implications of different dimensions of perfectionist behavior on one's academic performance, our investigation will include individual evaluations of both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. By utilizing the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), *perfectionist strivings* will be categorized using the two subscales- *personal standards*, and *concerns with precision, organization, and order*. This dimension of perfectionism can be gauged using Questions 4,6,12,16,19,24,30, which serve as markers of excessively high personal standards, while Questions 2,7,8,27,29,31 measure the extent of one's concern for organization and precision.

Perfectionist concerns, on the other hand, will be categorized using the subscales- concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, and excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation. Questions (9, 10, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34) of the study, were used to evaluate the extent of one's constant self-scrutiny, representative of perfectionist concerns in relation to self-perception, while Questions 1, 3, 5, 11,15, 20, 22, 26, 35 represent perfectionist concerns in relation to societal and parental perception.

Academic Excellence

While it is true that the ability to perform well, or to excel, is rather difficult to define, considering that there are various aspects in one's life that may be taken into account for conceptualizing whether or not perfectionism- or exceptionally high personal standards, actually serve to benefit overall performance.

To measure one's academic excellence, a combination of three different factors can be considered, social collaborative efforts, academic skill discerned using grades, or average scores from the year prior and self-confidence in one's abilities and skills. However, due to the difficulties in measuring a variety of these factors, the experiment simply attempts to utilize a percentile score of the average scores of students in the 10th grade, of subjects such as English, Math, Science, and 1 foreign language, to achieve an overall understanding of their proficiency in various fields of knowledge.

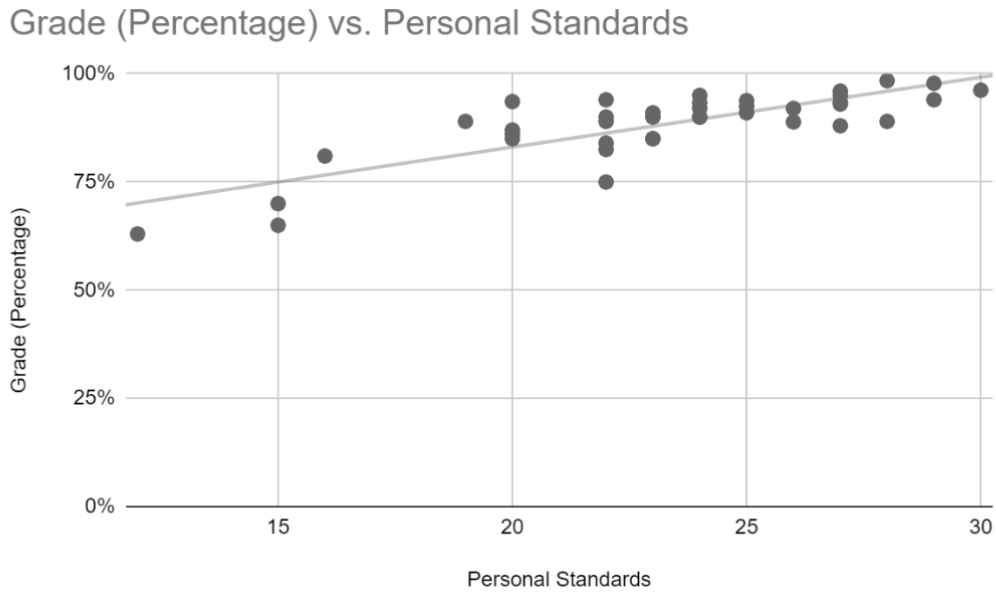
Due to a perfectionist's tendency to avoid any chance of errors or mistakes and achieve extreme internal focus and control over themselves and their actions, we predicted that perfectionists would be more persistent in regards to striving for academic performance than others. Hence, we hypothesized that participants with higher perfectionist tendencies would display higher academic performance. Results were all recorded anonymously, over an online survey form.

Sample Size

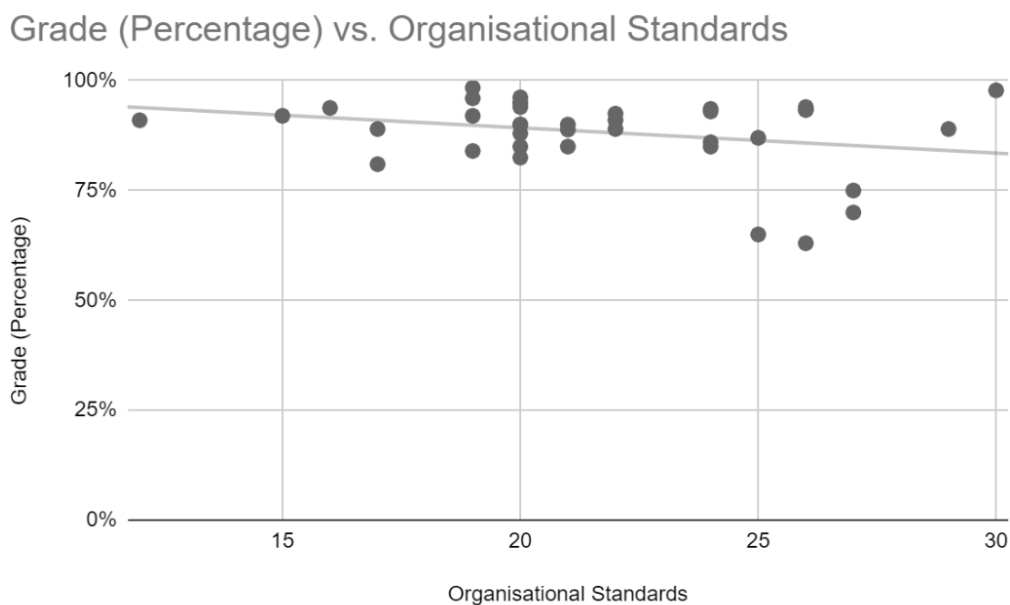
The sample for the experiment was obtained from high school students from two metropolitan cities (Mumbai and Aurangabad) between the ages of 15 and 24 years (10th Grade to recent college graduates). The total sample size was around 46 participants, consisting of participants who attended or graduated from three different curriculum boards- ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education), CBSE (Central Board Of Secondary Education) and IGCSE (The International General Certificate of Secondary Education). The participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the experiment, from 2 different High Schools in the city. 65.9% of our participants were between the 11th and 12th Grades, 24.4% were High School Graduates, and 9.8% were 10th Graders. It is important to note that the overall (aggregate score) of the participants was calculated based on different programs, although due to the low variance in results regardless of the curriculum, we do not believe that the intensity of the program had an adverse effect on the reliability of our results.

Data Analysis

The sample obtained ($n = 42$), depicted a high correlation between one's personal standards and expectations ($r = 0.814$). A high correlation between personal standards and grades signifies a strong relation between an individual's expectations and their academic performance. When personal standards are elevated, individuals tend to be ambitious, demonstrating a commitment to excellence and thrive for success in their academics. This correlation suggests that individuals with high personal standards are likely to invest considerable effort and dedication into their studies, seeking to achieve not only academic excellence but also personal growth. It also implies that these high personal standards act as a motivational factor, propelling individuals to consistently strive for academic success. This correlation may have positive implications on personal and professional development, as individuals with high personal standards are likely to carry this commitment to excellence into their future endeavours.

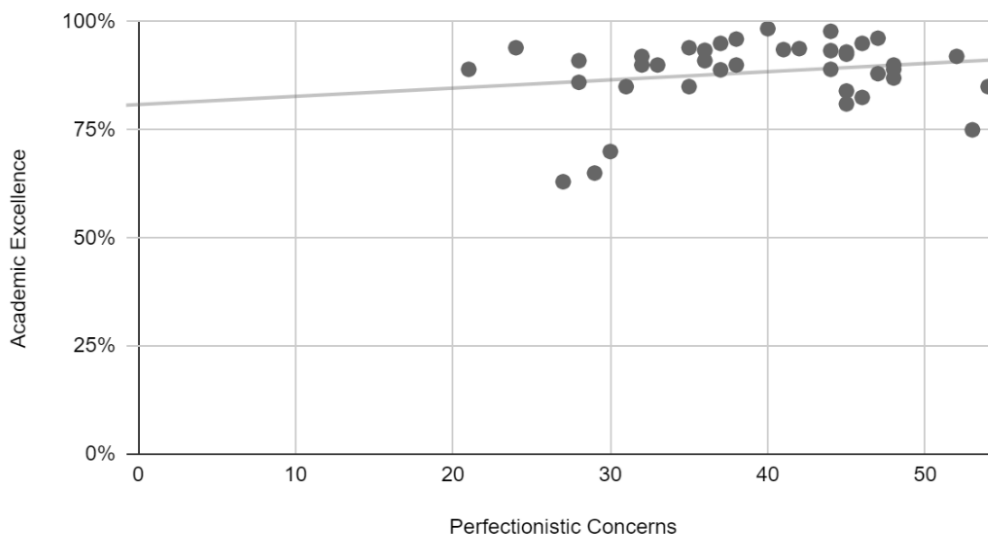


A negative correlation between organizational standards and grades ($r = -0.27447$) indicates a notable disconnect between the expectations set by an organization and the academic performance of individuals. This may arise due to various factors, perhaps such as individuals being more likely to prioritize their academic progress over their general cleanliness or organizational standards, making them neglect their overall awareness regarding their surroundings and general vicinity. However, it is true that the correlation is very poor- and therefore any conclusions made analysing the relationship between the two variables cannot be completely reliable. The negative organizational standards could also be a result of a desire for, or self-inflicted stress due to the constant pursuit of academic success. This stress can result in anxiety, or in more extreme cases, depression, which can manifest as diminished interest or pleasure in activities or tasks, fatigue, trouble concentrating, etc- which would explain a decrease in organizational standards.



Perfectionist concerns, while also having a positive effect on academic excellence ($r=0.196$), have a more limited effect on Academic Performance in comparison to Perfectionistic Strivings. This may be a result of self-imposed pressure or stressors that perfectionistic concerns create leading to a difficulty in one’s ability to focus; both concentration and working memory tend to have a negative relationship with anxiety and stress, which could be a result of excess perfectionist concerns. However, very low perfectionistic concerns also to a certain extent coincided with worse scores- suggesting that a lack of perfectionistic concerns may lead to a careless attitude that is detrimental to one’s academic performance.

Perfectionist Concerns vs Academic Excellence



The overall correlation between the degree of perfectionism and academic excellence is prevalent ($r=0.427$), which proves that it is possible for one’s perfectionistic concerns and standards to directly influence one’s competence at academics, predictably due to higher expectations for oneself motivating individuals practice to further their performance. Or, alternatively, it fuels a sense of inadequacy and incites the need to be more diligent with their efforts. Either way, it leads to a positive correlation between the two.

Evaluation

The results suggest that the hypothesis was correct to a certain extent- while perfectionistic strivings do have a strong positive correlation with the academic performance of an individual- perfectionistic concerns do not seem to have quite as significant of an impact at all, while organizational standards had no discernible effect in particular. This suggests that different aspects of perfectionism individually influence academic performance to different degrees.

Questions implying concern for social perception of oneself, such as ‘Other people’s respect is extremely important to me’ were on average, rated far higher than those that directly relate one’s academic performance to their sense of self-worth- ‘If someone does a task at school better than me, I consider it loss’, which may suggest that a desire to succeed academically may be born of a need to gain social approval rather than a direct conscious correlation between one’s self-perception and academic excellence.

Other studies (Madigan, D. J. (2019) have previously found results contrasting the results that we found in the study- which could potentially reveal inconsistencies due to limitations in sample size or diversity

of participants included. Additionally, while Organizational standards are typically associated with discipline, which is conducive to the kind of consistent effort and dedication necessary for keeping up one's academic performance, our study showed a subtle negative correlation between the two, which is a topic of contention.

Limitations

The sample size of the study was limited- due to the reluctance of participants to fill in the FMPS- as it requires a level of transparency that not every participant may be comfortable with- leading to a sample size of only 42 participants, which may impact the validity of our study. Some participants may also have been reluctant to share their results out of fear of societal judgment, causing them to embellish their results- which may mean that this self-reporting may create a possible bias in our study that undermines certain aspects of our study. Secondly, while perfectionism has shown a continuous correlation with academic performance, whether it directly contributes to motivation for improving one's performance, or whether a third unknown variable is leading to both ambitious attitudes and perfectionistic tendencies- making it difficult to discern whether the relationship discovered is a result of a direct cause and effect relationship, as predicted.

Additionally, when discussing research findings, it's important to consider the limitations. One notable limitation is the reliance on self-assessment for the responses collected. Self-assessed results may have bias, as participants may have unintentionally provided inaccurate responses due to misunderstanding of questions, recalling information incorrectly, or presenting themselves in a more favourable light.

This subjectivity can lead to discrepancies between reported and actual behaviours of people, thus affecting the validity and reliability of the findings.

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