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Relationship among perfectionism, academic procrastination and life satisfaction of university students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine whether the perfectionist personality trait in university students predicts their academic procrastinations and life satisfactions. Research participants were 230 students attending Anadolu University - Faculty of Education in spring semester of 2007-2008 School Year. Data were collected by Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale for perfectionist personality trait, Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student for academic procrastination, and Life Satisfaction Scale for life satisfaction. Regression analysis was done for research findings. In the conclusion of the analysis, it was found that self-oriented perfectionist personality trait significantly predicted academic procrastination and life satisfaction.

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Keywords: Perfectionism, self-oriented perfection, other-oriented perfection, socially-prescribed perfectionism, academic procrastination, life satisfaction, university students.

1. Introduction

Although much of the literature on perfectionism is mentioned with negative situations like low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and procrastination, these bring together possessing internal control, decisiveness, discipline and aspiration of being successful. Positive traits, beside negative ones, of the perfectionist person provide them happiness in their lives.

1.1. Perfectionism

Hewitt and Flett (1991) suggest that the concept of perfectionism has personal and social dimensions and that the structure needs to be assessed in a multidimensional way. In the personal dimension of perfectionism is the “self-oriented perfectionism”. Characteristics of this dimension are self-imposition of rather high standards, critical assessment of one’s behaviors and performance, adoption of all-or-none principle, and sole focus on either success or failure in the results attained (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Flett, Hewitt & Martin, 1995). This type of perfectionism motivates the individual towards being perfect while at the same time brings together the desire of avoiding error.

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Interpersonal dimension of perfectionism on the other hand is the “other-oriented perfectionism”. This dimension contains the imposition of high standards towards individuals deemed important and placing emphasis on meeting of those standards. This type of perfectionism is associated with critical assessment of performances of others, accusing them, distrusting them and having hostile feelings against them (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; 2004; Flett, Hewitt & Martin, 1995). The third and the social dimension of perfectionism is “socially-prescribed perfectionism” towards the expectations of others from the self. This dimension contains the perceived ability to meet the standards and expectations imposed by others deemed important by the self. In this type of perfectionism, there is a belief that others set very high standards for the self and that one can be satisfied only by achieving those standards (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Flett, Hewitt & Martin, 1995).

Perfectionism has been found to be associated with many psychopathologies and inharmonious behaviors (Adkins & Parker, 1996; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Another negative trait found to be related with perfectionism is procrastination. Considered in the context of university students, it is seen that students who exhibit perfectionist character traits show more procrastination in academic issues.

1.2. Academic Procrastination

Academic procrastination was defined as to leave academic tasks, such as preparing for exams and doing homework, to the last minute and to feel discomfort out of this (Slomon & Rothblum, 1984; Milgram, Mey-Tal & Levinson, 1998). It is described as deliberately delaying one’s tasks on academic issues in fear of making mistakes (Senecal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995; Schouwenburg, 1992), postponing a task that needs to be completed (Schouwenburg, 1995) and bad time management (Milgram, Marshevsky, & Sadeh, 1995).

1.3. Perfectionism and Academic Procrastination

Many authors indicate that perfectionists and procrastinators have some characteristics in common. Both have high standards (Burke & Yuen, 1983) and want to approve nonrealistic beliefs (Beswick, Rothblum & Mann, 1988; Flett, et al., 1991). In addition, both types of individuals experience the fear of making mistakes (Flett, et al., 1991; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) while exhibiting a tendency of attributing importance to the continuation of perpetual success (Flett et al., 1992).

When considering the cause and effect relationship between perfectionist and procrastination, researchers suggest that most people exhibit procrastination since they are perfectionists (Burke & Yuen, 1983; Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Perfectionist individuals impose irrationally high standards on themselves and show procrastination because they do not believe that they could meet those standards. Ferrari (1989) states that procrastinators often have a perfectionist feature about how others would assess them. They are not able to complete tasks that need to be done because they excessively focus on the standards set for them and think too much over how others would assess them. For this reason, there is a causal relationship between perfectionism and academic procrastination (Onwuegbuzie, 2000).

Examining the studies that dealt with the relationship between perfectionist personality trait and procrastination, Flett et al. (1992) concluded that there is a relationship between socially-prescribed perfectionism and academic procrastination but that there is little relationship between self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination. Similarly, Sadler and Sacks (1993) and Wernicke (1999) suggest that a relationship exists between socially-prescribed perfectionism and academic procrastination. Martin, et al. (1993) in a study they made with university students found a positive correlation between the social dimension of perfectionism and procrastination, and a negative correlation between procrastination and the personal dimension of perfectionism. In a study by Cakıcı (2003), a negative correlation was found between academic procrastination and self-oriented perfectionism, and a positive correlation with the perfectionism on the expectations of others from the self. Lay (1986) found a relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination, while Busko (1998) concluded that self-oriented perfectionism negatively influence the academic procrastination. Evaluating the study results, it is seen that all dimensions of perfectionism is related with academic procrastination.

1.4. Life satisfaction

Although the results obtained from these studies imply that perfectionist often causes negative behaviors, recently it has been argued that this personality trait also lead to positive feelings such as subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a concept that contains both emotional and cognitive evaluation of one's life (Diener, Oishi., & Lucas, (2003). Life satisfaction includes an assessment where the individual checks the self-imposed standards against the life conditions (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Likewise, perfectionism is the assessing by the individual the quality of performance based on the preset standards by that individual. Therefore, the ability of the individual to meet the standards set increases life satisfaction. In contrast, when the difference between the perceived standards and the actual performance increases, life satisfaction decreases.

There was not study found that researched perfectionist personality trait, procrastination and life satisfaction. It was seen that most of the studies dealing with the relationship between perfectionist personality trait and life satisfaction researched the correlation between the harmonious and inharmonious aspects of perfectionism and life satisfaction. Investigators concluded that the perfectionist personality trait affected the life satisfaction moderately and negatively (Chang, 2000), and that perfectionist thoughts decreased life satisfaction (Chang, 2000; Flet et al., 1998).

When the relations between social and personal dimensions of perfectionism and life satisfaction are examined, a negative correlation is found between socially-prescribed perfectionism and life satisfaction, while no correlation is found between self-oriented perfectionism and life satisfaction (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998). In a similar vein, Ashby and Rice (2002) found a negative correlation between socially-prescribed perfectionism and life satisfaction.

According to the study results, there was a positive correlation between social dimension of perfectionism and life satisfaction, and no correlation with other dimensions. The assessment of studies shows that negative influences of perfectionist personality trait such as academic procrastination were studied very amply, while very few studies were made on the issue of positive influences of multidimensional perfectionism, particularly, such as life satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship among the multidimensional perfectionist personality trait, academic procrastination and life satisfaction.

2. Method

164 female (71%) and 66 male (28%), totaling 230 students attending Anadolu University – Faculty of Education in spring semester of 2007-2008 school year participated in the study. Of the students, 67 were first-grade, 58 second-grade, 60 third-grades and 45 fourth-grades. Median age was 21.

2.1. Instruments

In the study, Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student for academic procrastination and Life Satisfaction Scale were utilized as data collection tools.

2.1.1. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale

Perfectionism traits of students were measured by Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991), adapted to Turkish by Oral (1999). The scale measures perfectionist behaviors in three dimensions as towards self, towards others and towards expectations from social environments, and consists of total 45 items. The scale is answered in likert type (1 = strongly agree, 7 = Strongly disagree); higher points show higher perfectionism while lower points indicate lower perfectionism.

2.1.2. Academic Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student

In the study, academic procrastination was measured by “Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student” developed by Solomon and Rothblum (1984), adapted to Turkish by Uzunözer and Demir (2007). The scale consists of 2 parts

and total 44 items. The first part contains 18 items, each 5-point likert type, in order to measure the “areas of prevalence of procrastination”. The second part is called “Reasons of Procrastination” and contains a scenario towards students about preparing a term paper. Each part consists of 26 items each with 5 likert type points (1 = does not reflect my reason for procrastination at all, 5 = fully reflects my reason for procrastination).

2.1.3.. *Life Satisfaction Scale*

Life satisfaction of students was measured by Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985), worked on by Köker (1991) for Turkish adaptations. The scale consists of total 5 items. It is answered in likert type (1 = not adequate at all, 7 = very adequate) and higher points show higher life satisfaction while lower points reflect lower life satisfaction.

2.2. *Data Analysis*

It was endeavored to collect data from students from each department of the Anadolu University – Faculty of Education in the spring term of 2007-2008 school year. Scatter diagram of SPSS program was used to examine whether there was a linear relationship between perfectionism trait, which was the predictor variable in the study, and academic procrastination and life satisfaction. A linear relationship was determined between predictor variable and predicted variable. Pearson correlation coefficients between variables were calculated and then the method of stepwise regression analysis was performed. In the study, the level of significance was taken as .05.

3. Results

In this section, first the relationship between the predicted variables, which are academic procrastination and life satisfaction, and perfectionist traits (self-oriented, other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism) was presented (Table 1), and then the results of regression analysis for concerned variables were given (Table 2). As seen in Table 1, a significant negative correlation was determined between self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination ($r = -.199$), while a positive significant correlation was found between self-oriented perfectionism and life satisfaction ($r = .166$). No correlation was found among other-oriented perfectionism, academic procrastination and life satisfaction.

Table 1. Simple correlation between variables that account for academic procrastination and life satisfaction (n = 230)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-oriented perfectionism		.407**	.308**	-.199**	.166*
2. Other-oriented perfectionism	.407**		.303**	-.056	.045
3. Socially-prescribed perfectionism	.308**	.303**		.007	-.081
4. Academic procrastination	-.199**	-.056	.007		-.152*
5. Life satisfaction	.166*	.045	-.081	-.152*	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

In this study, stepwise regression analysis was performed to determine the predictors of academic procrastination and life satisfaction of students. Analysis results are provided in Table 2 and Table 3.

As seen in Table 2, self-oriented perfectionism significantly predicts academic procrastination ($R = .212$, $R^2 = .045$, $p < .01$). Self-oriented perfectionism of students accounts for 4.5% variance of academic procrastination. However, other- and self-oriented perfectionism does not predict academic procrastination.

Table 2. Results of stepwise regression analysis for prediction of academic procrastination of university students

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F	Sig.
	β	SH	Beta							
Self-oriented perfectionism	-.099	.032	-.228		-3.125	.212	.045	.032	3.555	.015*

*p < .01

As seen in Table 3, self-oriented perfectionism personality trait significantly predicts life satisfaction (R = .216, R² = .047, p < .01). Self-oriented perfectionism of students accounts for 3.4% variance of life satisfaction. However, other- and self-oriented perfectionism does not predict life satisfaction.

Table 3. Results of stepwise regression analysis for prediction of life satisfaction of university students

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F	Sig.
	β	SH	Beta							
Self-oriented perfectionism	-.091	.031	.209		2.875	.216	.047	.034	3.692	.013*

*p < .01

Regression coefficients, R² and t values seen in the results of the analysis made to determine the influence of perfectionist personality trait on predicting the academic procrastination and life satisfaction of students show that academic procrastination and life satisfaction of students were predicted by perfectionist personality trait. On the other hand, it was concluded that other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism did not predict the academic procrastination and life satisfaction of the prospective teachers.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of perfectionist personality traits on predicting academic procrastination and life satisfaction of university students. Analysis results showed that academic procrastination and life satisfaction of students were predicted by self-oriented perfectionist personality trait. In contrast, it was concluded that other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism traits did not predict academic procrastination and life satisfaction of teacher candidates.

Studies made with university students on perfectionist personality trait and academic procrastination produced findings which indicate that self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination are negatively correlated (Seo, 2008; Saddler & Buley, 1999; Busko, 1998; Park & Kwon, 1998; Flett, et al. 1995; Frost et al., 1990) and positively correlated (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). There also exists study findings suggesting that there is no correlation between the two variables (Onwuegbuzie, 2000; Wernicke, 1999; Saddler & Sacks, 1993 and Flett, et al. 1992).

The finding obtained from this study indicating that there is a negative correlation between the self-oriented perfectionist personality trait and academic procrastination is consistent with the study findings obtained by Seo, (2008); Saddler & Buley, (1999); Busko, (1998); Park & Kwon, (1998); Flett, et al., (1995); Frost et al., (1990).

According to the researchers, individuals possessing a self-oriented perfectionism follow hard and nonrealistic standards they set for themselves, while they also thoroughly assess themselves in order to attain perfection and avoid mistakes. These individuals are extremely motivated, ambitious in accomplishing their tasks and are also very elaborate in their workings. They have an internal control focus and a potential to achieve success under some certain conditions. In addition to this, motivation sources of this type of perfectionists are internal and when they

come across a situation that necessitates success, they have a tendency to approach it, rather than avoid it. In this context, the self-oriented perfectionism of the individual is in negative relation with the academic procrastination.

Another finding obtained from this study is that no relationship was found between other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism, which are other dimensions of perfectionist personality trait, and academic procrastination. This finding is not consistent with the findings derived from the studies of Onwuegbuzie, 2000; Wernicke, 1999; Flett et al. 1992). Investigators propose that socially-prescribed perfectionism affects academic procrastination positively and that anxiety of being negatively assessed by others leads to avoiding mistakes and thus to academic procrastination.

In the study, findings about the relationship between perfectionist personality trait and life satisfaction indicate that self-oriented perfectionism predicts life satisfaction and there appears a positive correlation between them, while no correlation is found between social and other-oriented perfectionism and perfectionist personality trait.

The examination of findings of the studies that researched the perfectionism and life satisfaction relationship shows findings that contradict with the findings of the current study. When the literature is analyzed, it is discerned that there is a negative correlation between socially-prescribed perfectionism and life satisfaction (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009; Ashby and Rice, 2002; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998) and that no correlation exists between self-oriented perfectionism and life satisfaction (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009).

The most important standard among those that university students set for themselves is to get into university and acquire a profession. The group with which the study was made is successful since they are progressing towards acquiring a profession. As students get closer to the standards they set for themselves, they get more satisfaction from their lives.

Although perfectionism has some negative aspects, self-oriented perfectionism, in particular, has some benefits, as well, such as target setting, struggle to succeed, and being disciplined. Especially for university students, success in academic life will affect the overall life. From this angle, a great mission falls to universities and psychological counseling centers of universities towards prospective teachers who carry on their personality developments and have many opportunities to advance themselves. Students could be helped to attain awareness towards increasing of perfectionist traits and academic study skills by providing them, if necessary, professional help in the psychological counseling centers. Seminar works and psycho-educational programs could be arranged for their personal development. Also, for this goal, academic programs of Education Faculties could be enriched by elective courses for helping students explore their personal traits and enhance their professional skills.

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