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Original Article

PERFECTIONISM, EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND ANXIETY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationships among perfectionism, emotional regulation, and anxiety, with the goal of examining whether perfectionism and emotion regulation serve as predictors of anxiety. A total of 300 participants 163 males and 137 females completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and the Beck Anxiety Inventory. The correlation analysis indicated a significant positive association between perfectionism and emotion regulation; however, neither construct was significantly correlated with anxiety. Notably, regression analysis showed that perfectionism significantly predicted anxiety when controlling for emotion regulation, while emotion regulation itself did not emerge as a significant predictor. Additionally, no significant gender differences were found across the variables. These findings highlight the subtle but meaningful role of perfectionism in anxiety, suggesting its potential as a target for clinical intervention. The study's limitations involve its use of a cross-sectional approach and the reliance on participants' self-reports. Future research is recommended to incorporate longitudinal methods and broader psychological variables to better understand the complex interplay between personality traits, emotional processes, and Anxiety. The findings have important clinical implications, as addressing maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies may help reduce anxiety symptoms and improve psychological well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

University students face many challenges throughout their learning journey, often having to manage heavy workloads, social pressure and personal expectations. Among the psychological factors that influence their mental well-being, perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety play the crucial roles. These three variables are interrelated and significantly impact the psychological functioning of students, often contributing to emotional distress and mental health concerns. It is important to understand how these variables interact, as their relationships can provide insight into how academic pressures influence emotional well-being and how the students cope with the challenges they face. Perfectionism is considered "a personality trait characterized by the pursuit of flawlessness and the establishment of exceptionally high-performance standards, often coupled with critical self-evaluations" (Stoeber, 2011)." Emotional Regulation refers to a psychological mechanism through which individuals track, assess, and adjust their emotional responses to meet their objectives or react suitably to situational demands. It involves a variety of both conscious and unconscious tactics employed to affect the intensity, duration, and expression of emotions. This regulation is essential for preserving psychological well-being, establishing healthy relationships, and adapting to evolving life situations. According to APA Dictionary of

Psychology “Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”Although anxiety and fear are frequently used interchangeably, they represent different emotional responses. Anxiety is generally viewed as a future-oriented and prolonged reaction aimed at an uncertain or diffuse threat, while fear is a short-term, present-focused response triggered by a specific and identifiable danger".

Among university students, anxiety can take many forms. "Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is characterized by ongoing and uncontrollable worry about everyday events, such as academic results, future plans, or interpersonal relationships" (Jones & Williams, 2018). Social Anxiety Disorder is another common type, where students may experience extreme fear or discomfort in social or evaluative situations, such as giving a presentation, speaking in class, or attending group discussions (Johnson & Adams, 2019). Panic Disorder involves sudden and intense episodes of fear, often accompanied by physical symptoms like shortness of breath, chest pain, or a racing heart (Miller et al., 2017). Other forms, like specific phobias or test anxiety, can also impact students’ well-being, depending on individual sensitivities and experiences (Kumar & Patel, 2021). The university phase represents a critical developmental period. Students are not only expected to perform academically but are also learning to live independently, manage responsibilities, and shape their identities. These pressures, while normal, can become overwhelming when paired with certain personality traits or poor coping strategies. For instance, students with perfectionistic tendencies often set excessively high standards for themselves. When they are unable to meet these goals, they may internalize the failure, leading to increased self-doubt, stress, and heightened anxiety (Baker & Lee, 2019). This Perfectionism and anxiety link becomes more intense when students struggle with their ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences effectively (Green & Brown, 2020).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Philpot and Donachie (2025) conducted research titled "Perfectionism and Psychological Distress in University Students: The Role of Mistake Rumination," to investigate how mistake rumination—a repetitive, perseverative cognitive emotion regulation process—explains the relationship between perfectionism traits and psychological distress over time. A sample of university students completed self-report measures assessing multidimensional perfectionism, mistake rumination, and symptoms of anxiety and depression across longitudinal time points. The results revealed that socially prescribed perfectionism significantly predicted elevated anxiety and depression. Crucially, mistake rumination acted as a primary cognitive mediator, demonstrating that intrusive dwelling on past or potential errors turns perfectionist fears into real-time anxiety and emotional distress. These findings are highly relevant to the current study, as they highlight mistake rumination as a critical cognitive mechanism through which perfectionism triggers anxiety and emotional regulation difficulties in university populations**.** Catling et al. (2026) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Perfectionism, Sleep Quality, Resilience, Nature Contact, and Mobile Phone Use on University Student Anxiety and Depression," to examine contemporary cognitive and lifestyle predictors of generalized anxiety and depressive symptoms among undergraduate students. The study involved undergraduate students aged 18–25 years who completed standardized assessments measuring multidimensional perfectionism, resilience, sleep quality, and psychological distress. The findings revealed that multidimensional perfectionism was the single most robust predictor of generalized anxiety among university students, outperforming other lifestyle and cognitive variables. These results highlight the paramount role of perfectionist cognitions in driving student anxiety, offering strong support for the current research focus on perfectionism as a primary source of emotional distress in academic settings.

Zhang and Wang (2025) examined the relationship between perfectionism and psychological adaptation in their study, "Perfectionism and College Students’ Psychological Adaptation: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Emotion Regulation." The research evaluated how specific cognitive emotion regulation strategies influence the connection between perfectionistic concerns and evaluative anxiety. The study included college students who completed self-report inventories measuring dimensions of perfectionism, cognitive emotion regulation, and anxiety. The results showed that evaluative concerns (maladaptive perfectionism) significantly increased anxiety, primarily mediated by a preferential reliance on maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies such as catastrophizing and self-blame, rather than adaptive strategies like cognitive reappraisal. These findings directly align with the current

study by emphasizing how specific maladaptive emotion regulation strategies mediate perfectionism-induced anxiety. Liu, Wang, and Wei (2024) investigated the relationship between different perfectionism dimensions and emotional distress in their research titled "The Relationship Between Perfectionism and Emotional Distress Among College Students: The Role of Cognitive Coping Styles." The study aimed to differentiate the distinct cognitive pathways through which adaptive versus maladaptive perfectionism influence anxiety. Involving a sample of college students, the researchers evaluated perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, cognitive coping styles, and distress levels. Findings indicated that maladaptive perfectionism led to severe anxiety and distress due to cognitive inflexibility and catastrophic thinking, whereas adaptive perfectionism fostered higher self-efficacy and positive emotional regulation. This study provides important theoretical background for the current research by demonstrating how cognitive regulation mechanisms dictate whether perfectionistic tendencies lead to severe anxiety or healthy adaptation.

Lu, Chen, and Zhao (2024) conducted research titled "Maladaptive Perfectionism and Psychological Distress in University Students: A Sequential Mediation Model of Coping and Emotional Regulation," to analyze how perfectionist concerns lead to emotional distress and performance anxiety. The study utilized a sequential mediation framework among undergraduate students, measuring maladaptive perfectionism, emotion regulation deficits, avoidance-focused coping strategies, and academic anxiety. Results demonstrated that high concern over mistakes directly impaired effective emotion regulation, which subsequently triggered avoidance-focused coping mechanisms and heightened both social and performance-related anxiety. These findings strongly support the current study's conceptual rationale by proving that emotion regulation impairments and secondary coping deficits are key drivers of perfectionism-related anxiety in university environments. Woodrum and Kahn (2021) investigated how spontaneous emotion regulation mediates the link between experimentally induced failure and psychological distress among 165 college students with varying perfectionistic concerns. Participants completed an anagram task designed to induce either high or low failure, after which spontaneous emotion regulation and post-task affect were measured. Results revealed that under high perfectionistic concerns, spontaneous cognitive reappraisal mediated a positive indirect effect on failure and post-task negative affect. Conversely, at low perfectionistic concerns, spontaneous rumination mediated higher negative affect and lower positive affect. These findings underscore the critical role of real-time emotional regulation during failure experiences within perfectionism research.

Damian, Stoeber, Negru-Subtirica, and Băban (2017) conducted a study titled “On the Development of perfectionism: The Longitudinal Role of Academic Achievement and Academic Efficacy," which investigated the relationships among perfectionism, academic achievement, and academic efficacy. Their research, involving 487 adolescents (aged 12–19 years, 54% female) and using a cross-lagged longitudinal design across three time points (4–5 months apart), revealed that academic achievement predicted relative increases in both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns, even after controlling for academic efficacy. Additionally, academic efficacy was found to predict increases in perfectionistic strivings over time. These findings are relevant to the current study, as they highlight how perfectionistic tendencies can develop in academic settings—a context highly relevant for university students. Since perfectionism is closely linked to emotional experiences and coping mechanisms, understanding its development provides important background for examining how perfectionism may influence ER strategies and ANX levels among university populations. Wan, Li, and Han (2022) investigated the "relationship between perfectionism and test anxiety in junior high school students: the mediating role of self-efficacy and trait anxiety." This research examines how perfectionism influences test-related anxiety among junior high students within a collectivist cultural setting, such as China, and explores the mediating effects of self-efficacy and trait anxiety. The findings showed that adaptive perfectionism was a significant positive predictor of test anxiety, whereas maladaptive perfectionism did not show a significant association with test-taking anxiety in this group of students from a Chinese cultural background.

Zheng, Zhang, and Ran (2023) explored the internal processes linking academic stress to test anxiety (anxiety) among college students, particularly focusing on how parental expectations and emotional self-regulatory efficacy impact this relationship. The study, which surveyed 1,315 college students, revealed that academic stress was positively associated with test anxiety, while parental expectations had a negative effect on academic stress but were positively correlated with students' emotional self-efficacy. Notably, the research demonstrated that

emotional self-regulatory efficacy served as a mediator in the relationship between academic stress and test anxiety, with students possessing stronger emotional regulation abilities showing lower levels of test anxiety despite the pressures of academic demands. This research supports the importance of emotional regulation as a mediator between stress and anxiety, which is highly relevant to the study of perfectionism and anxiety in university students, particularly in understanding how emotional self-efficacy could mitigate anxiety related to perfectionistic tendencies. Saleem et al. (2019) examined anxiety and emotion regulation among 300 medical students at the Federal Medical and Dental College using the Beck Anxiety Inventory and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire. Findings revealed that anxiety positively correlated with expressive suppression and negatively with cognitive reappraisal. Furthermore, female students reported significantly higher anxiety and used expressive suppression more frequently than males, emphasizing gender-specific regulatory strategies in academic anxiety.

Qasim and Rana (2022) explored the role of mindfulness and emotion regulation in predicting psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and stress, among Pakistani medical students. The study, which used a correlational design and involved 216 participants, found a significant negative relationship between mindfulness, emotion regulation, and psychological distress. Moreover, mindfulness and emotion regulation were significant predictors of anxiety, in particular. These findings indicate that higher levels of mindfulness and better emotional regulation may help mitigate psychological distress in medical students, which directly supports the notion that Emotional regulation strategies can reduce anxiety. This research is relevant to the current study as it highlights the importance of emotional regulation and mindfulness in alleviating anxiety, a key aspect of perfectionism - related distress. Malik and Perveen (2023) examined the role of mindfulness and cognitive emotion regulation (CER) in anxiety among university students. The study, which included 210 students, revealed that mindfulness was negatively associated with anxiety, while maladaptive CER strategies were positively associated with anxiety. Additionally, the results showed that low mindfulness combined with maladaptive CER strategies led to higher levels of anxiety. This study emphasizes the importance of both mindfulness and adaptive emotion regulation strategies in reducing anxiety symptoms, suggesting that improving mindfulness and promoting adaptive CER strategies can help reduce anxiety. These findings are highly relevant to the current research, as they point to the critical role of emotion regulation strategies, including mindfulness, in managing anxiety related to perfectionism.

In the study by Nadeem, Umer, and Anwar (2023), the authors explored the relationship between emotion regulation and academic performance among university students. They found that cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with academic performance, while expressive suppression was negatively associated. These results suggest that students who use cognitive reappraisal as an emotion regulation strategy tend to perform better academically, while those who rely on expressive suppression may experience more difficulties. This research highlights the importance of emotion regulation not only in managing anxiety but also in academic success, offering further evidence that cognitive reappraisal can be beneficial in reducing the negative impact of perfectionism on both academic performance and emotional well-being. Each of these studies supports the central focus of the current thesis on the relationship between perfectionism, Emotional Regulation, and anxiety in university students. They provide valuable insights into how emotional regulation strategies such as mindfulness, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression can either mitigate or exacerbate anxiety, particularly in high-pressure environments like medical and university settings. By highlighting the mediating role of emotional regulation in anxiety, these studies offer useful evidence for understanding how to better manage perfectionism and its associated distress among students.

Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the connection between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety among university students, a group particularly vulnerable to these issues due to academic and personal pressures. perfectionism, characterized by excessively high standards and fear of failure, is linked to various psychological difficulties, including anxiety and stress, particularly when coupled with poor emotion regulation (Flett& Hewitt, 2002; Gross, 2002). University students, facing intense academic demands and transitions, often struggle with these factors, which can exacerbate anxiety and hinder mental well-being. Despite the established connections between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety, there is limited research on how these factors interact specifically within this population. By examining these relationships, this study aims to provide

insights that can inform targeted interventions to help students manage perfectionism, improve emotion regulation, and reduce anxiety, ultimately supporting both their mental health and academic success.

Objectives

1. To find out the association between perfectionism, and anxiety in university students.
2. To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and anxiety among university students.
3. To examine the relationship between perfectionism and emotion regulation among university students.
4. To examine gender differences in perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety among university students.
5. To examine whether perfectionism and emotion regulation predict anxiety among university students.

Hypotheses

H1: A significant positive relationship exists between perfectionism and anxiety among university students.
H2: A significant negative relationship exists between emotion regulation and anxiety among university students.
H3: A significant negative relationship exists between perfectionism and emotion regulation.
H4: There is no significant gender difference in perfectionism, emotional regulation and anxiety.
H5: Perfectionism and emotional regulation significantly predict anxiety.

III. METHOD

Participants

This study was adopted a quantitative, non-probability, correlational research design to explore the relationships between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety in university students. The study included a sample of 300 university students, aged 18 to 25 years, who were recruited from various departments within the university or graduate colleges. Participants were selected through a non- probability sampling method to ensure the sample is representative of the student population. The inclusion criterion for this study was that participants must be currently enrolled in university. Students who self-report any diagnosed psychiatric conditions (such as depression or anxiety disorders) was excluded from participation to control for variables that could influence emotion regulation or anxiety levels.

Measures

Following assessment measures were used to get the information from the participants during the collection of data; [I] Demographic Information Sheet, [II] Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)**:** The MPS short scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) is a 15-item scale, uses a 7-point Likert scale that measures perfectionism across several dimensions, including personal standards, concern over mistakes, and doubts about actions. Higher scores on the MPS reflect higher levels of perfectionism. [III] Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ): The ERQ (Gross & John, 2003) is a 10-item scale used to assess two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. It uses a 7-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflect more frequent use of each strategy. [IV] Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI): The BAI (Beck et al., 1988) is a 21-item self-report measure that assesses the severity of anxiety symptoms. Respondents rate how much they have been bothered by anxiety -related symptoms over the past week, with higher scores indicating higher anxiety levels.

Procedure

Data collection begins with obtaining permission from the authors of the scale. Approval is requested from the appropriate authority to conduct the research. The participants' ages ranges from 18 - 25 years old. This study utilizes correlational research design. A purposive non-probability sampling method is applied. Adolescents are recruited from schools. The selected sample is briefed about the study's objectives and nature before obtaining signed consent. They are debriefed after the information is guaranteed to be confidential. The participants fill out the demographic information sheet first and followed by the questionnaire. The corresponding completed questionnaires are returned along with verbal appreciation and gratitude for their participation in the study. The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS. Reliability analysis, Pearson product moment correlation, independent sample t-test and regression was used to analyzed the data.

IV.RESULTS

Table I: Following are Reliability and Descriptive Analyses for each Assessment Measure, Actual and Potential Ranges of Variables

Scales	*M*	*SD*	Range	Cronbach's *a*
MPS	62.48	9.94	13-84	.64
ERQ	43.72	8.89	20-60	.74
BAI	43.24	13.84	21-71	.93

Note. M=Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach alpha

The averages, standard deviations, number of items, internal reliabilities, and observed score ranges for each assessment measure are shown in the above table. Cronbach's alpha was used for reliability analyses. While the Emotional regulation Questionnaire showed satisfactory reliability (α =.74), the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale showed moderate internal consistency (α =.64). The internal consistency of the Beck anxiety Inventory was high (α =.93). According to these findings, the measures—in particular, the anxiety scale—are trustworthy instruments for evaluating the constructs in the current sample.

Table II: Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Perfectionism	300	62.48	9.94	_	.392**	.092
2. Emotional regulation	300	43.72	8.89		_	-049**
3. Anxiety	300	43.24	13.84			_

***p*<.001

The descriptive statistics and correlation analysis showed that the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale had a mean of 62.48 (SD = 9.94), Emotional Regulation Questionnaire had a mean of 43.72 (SD = 8.89), and Beck Anxiety Inventory had a mean of 43.24 (SD = 13.84). A significant positive correlation was found between MPS and ERQ (r = .392, p < .01), indicating that higher levels of MPS are associated with higher ERQ scores. However, MPS and BAI (r = .092), as well as ERQ and BAI (r = -0.049), did not show significant relationships, suggesting no meaningful association between these variables.

Table III: Independent Sample T-Test Shows gender difference for Perfectionism, Emotional Regulation and Anxiety in University Students

	Males		Females				
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(298)	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Perfectionism	63.02	9.77	61.83	10.13	1.03	.346	0.11
Emotional regulation	43.45	8.87	43.45	8.93	-.56	.881	0.0
Anxiety	42.59	14.20	43.59	13.45	-.402	.435	0.07

The results of independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences in levels of perfectionism, emotional regulation, or anxiety. Males and females scored similarly on the Multidimensional perfectionism scale, emotional regulation questionnaire, and beck anxiety inventory, with p-values well above the conventional alpha level of .05. The confidence intervals for all comparisons included zero, further indicating that the observed differences were not statistically meaningful. These findings suggest that gender does not significantly influence these psychological constructs within the sample.

Table IV: Regression of Perfectionism, Emotional Regulation and Anxiety in University Students

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	95% CI		*p*
				LL	*UL*	
Constant		5.49	38.66	27.84	49.48	0.00
Perfectionism	.131	.087	.182	0.10	.35	0.38
Emotional regulation	-.100	097	-.155	-.34	.036	.112
F			2.53			
R^2			.017			

Note. N = 300 B = Beta; SE = Standard deviation; p =sig LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

The regression analysis revealed that MPS significantly predicted the dependent variable, with a positive unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.182, SE = 0.087), indicating that higher MPS scores are associated with higher outcomes on the dependent variable. The standardized beta coefficient for MPS (β = 0.131) also supports this positive relationship. In contrast, ERQ did not significantly predict the dependent variable (B = -0.155, SE = 0.097; β = -0.100), suggesting its influence was not statistically meaningful in this model. The model accounted only for 1.7% of the variance in the dependent variable (R^2 = 0.017), indicating a weak explanatory power overall.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships among perfectionism, emotion regulation, and anxiety. Findings showed a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and emotion regulation, suggesting that individuals with higher perfectionistic tendencies may engage more in emotional control strategies to maintain high standards and avoid perceived failure. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that perfectionism is closely related to emotional processes and psychological distress (Aldea & Rice, 2006). Interestingly, neither perfectionism nor emotion regulation showed a significant bivariate correlation with anxiety. However, regression analysis revealed that perfectionism significantly predicted anxiety when emotion regulation was controlled. This finding supports the view of perfectionism as a cognitive vulnerability for anxiety, as excessive standards, fear of mistakes, and self-criticism may contribute to anxious thoughts and distress. Previous research has similarly identified perfectionism as an important factor associated with anxiety and related psychological difficulties (Egan et al., 2011). Emotion regulation did not significantly predict anxiety, which may indicate that its effects depend on the type of strategies used or on other contextual factors. Gender differences were also not significant across the study variables, suggesting that the observed patterns may be similar across male and female participants. Overall, the findings highlight perfectionism as an important predictor of anxiety, while emotion regulation appears to have a more complex role. Since the regression model explained only a limited amount of variance in anxiety, future research should consider additional factors such as stress, coping styles, social support, and personality traits such as neuroticism. Longitudinal studies may also provide a clearer understanding of how these variables contribute to the development of anxiety.

Limitations

There are limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents any causal inferences from being made. Second, the use of self-report measures may introduce bias related to social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions. Third, the low variance explained by the regression model highlights the limited scope of the current variables and the need for a broader framework in understanding anxiety.

VI.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings suggest that perfectionism plays a significant role in anxiety, whereas emotion regulation was not a significant predictor. Gender differences were also not significant. These results highlight the importance of considering perfectionism in understanding anxiety and support the need for further research using broader variables and longitudinal approaches.

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