

Big Five Personality Factors, Perceived Parenting Styles, and Perfectionism among Academically Gifted Students

Zainon Basirion¹, Rosadah Abd Majid¹ & Zalizan Mohd Jelas¹

¹ Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

Correspondence: Rosadah Abd Majid, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel: 60-19-329-6769. E-mail: rosadah@ukm.my

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Abstract

This study focuses on the examination of Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles in predicting positive and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students. Through cross-sectional random sampling procedures, 448 form four students (16 years old) involved particularly those who scored straight A's in Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR). The participants responded to three related instruments, comprises of the International Personality Item Pool, Parental Authority Questionnaire, and Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. The study utilized K-Mean cluster analysis to cluster the perfectionism of the students. Stepwise multiple regressions used to determine the role of Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles in predicting positive and negative perfectionism. The findings showed 259 (57.8%), 136 (30.4%), and 53 (11.8%) students were clustered to dysfunctional/neurotic perfectionistic, healthy/normal perfectionistic, and non-perfectionistic, respectively. The results of two separate stepwise multiple regression analyses found that positive perfectionism was significantly predicted by several factors including paternal authoritative style, openness to experiences, maternal authoritative style, and conscientiousness. On the other hand, negative perfectionism was significantly predicted by maternal authoritarian style, neuroticism, and paternal authoritarian style. As predicted, permissive parenting style showed no contribution in predicting positive and negative perfectionism. Implications, limitations, and recommendation of the study are addressed briefly in this research. In fact, this is one of the first empirical studies of perfectionism relating to Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles among academically gifted students in Malaysia.

Keywords: academically gifted students, Big Five personality factors, perceived parenting styles, perfectionism

1. Introduction

Academically gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both intellectual areas and specific academic fields. Myths that academically gifted students don't need help as they will do fine in their own and they are happy, popular and well-adjusted in school, have been proven wrong (Chan, 2010; SpeirsNeumeister, Williams, & Cross, 2009; Tam & Phillipson, 2013). Their characteristics often lead to social and emotional problems that can affect their emotional and social development, and one of the characteristics is perfectionism. Previously, perfectionism has been examined primarily from a pathological perspective as a negative characteristic that must be eliminated if gifted students are to function successfully (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007). However, many researchers now believe that perfectionism exists on a continuum of behaviors and thoughts and has positive or negative aspects (Silverman, 2007). There are not enough studies carried out in Malaysia to identify clusters of perfectionisms among academically gifted students. The students should know at what cluster of perfectionisms they are in so that appropriate interventions and enrichment programs can be done for them by teachers at schools and parents at home. Flett and Hewitt (2002) indicated two major factors contribute to the development of perfectionism, which are parenting styles and personality of the child. McCrae and Costa (1987) identified Big Five personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) while Baumrind (1971) highlighted three types of parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative). Since academically gifted students have the tendencies to be perfectionists (Chan, 2010; Silverman, 2007), investigation on what kind of personality and perceived parenting style that contribute to the development of positive and negative perfectionism is a need.

1.1 Problem Statement

Perfectionism is a combination of thoughts and behaviors associated with excessively high standards or expectations for one's own performance and are recognized as a common emotional trait of giftedness (Chan, 2010; Silverman, 2007; SpeirsNeumeister et al., 2009). Setting high and demanding goals for oneself can either be a positive or negative force in one's life. Hence, it can lead to positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism (Maksic & Iwasaki, 2009). Negative perfectionism exists within an individual who strives for excessive and unrealistically high standard, and is overly critical and evaluative of their own behavior (Chan, 2010; Silverman, 2007). In order to fulfill other's expectations, the individual strives for standards that are unattainable. The motivation lies on the fear to failure and worrying persists even when the standards have been met. Meanwhile, positive perfectionism refers to perfectionist behavior in which the individual has a willingness to approach stimuli, and strives to achieve high standards. The individual sets high goals and personal standards, and strives for the rewards associated with achievement, while retaining the ability to be satisfied with one's performance (Silverman, 2007; SpeirsNeumeister et al., 2009). Although there is agreement about the positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism, there is still lack of study on the distinction between positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism faced by academically gifted students in Malaysia.

Previous studies identified several factors leading to the formation of perfectionism among this population. Two major factors were personality and parenting styles (Besharat, Azizi, & Poursharifi, 2011; Flett & Hewitt, 2002; SpeirsNeumeister et al., 2009). Apparently, only a few researches have been done in the local context employing *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (MBTI) to academically gifted students (CheMah & Mariani, 2001; Mohd Zuri, Rahimi, Nik Rosila, & Aznan, 2008). Hence, there is still lack of research that employs the Big Five personality factors particularly combining with perfectionism among academically gifted students. Other studies examined the Big Five personality factors and relate it to perfectionism (Khodarahimi, 2010; Navarez & Cayubit, 2011; Rice et al., 2007; Zeidner & Shani-Zinovitch, 2011). However the samples represented normal population. Therefore, the gap still exists mainly on the use of the Big Five personality factors and its role in predicting positive and negative perfectionisms among academically gifted students in Malaysia.

Many studies have documented that parenting has a powerful influence in child development. Researchers abroad have demonstrated the association between parenting styles and perfectionist tendencies in children (Besharat et al., 2011; Biran & Reese, 2007; Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Kenney-Benson & Pomerantz, 2005). Studies found that there were positive correlations between authoritarian parenting style and negative perfectionism, and also between authoritative parenting style and positive perfectionism (SpeirsNeumeister, 2004). Parenting styles in the West are different to parenting styles practiced in the East (Besharat et al., 2011), therefore there is a need to investigate the roles of parenting styles practiced in Malaysia that predict positive and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students. Even though many research have been done to identify the roles of personality and parenting styles to the development of positive and negative perfectionism, they are done separately (Besharat et al., 2011; Biran & Reese, 2007; Khodarahimi, 2010; Navarez & Cayubit, 2011). This study will fulfil this gap where the roles of personality and parenting styles will be combined together to find their contributions to the development of positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To identify clusters of perfectionisms among academically gifted students.
- 2) To identify the roles of Big Five personality traits and perceived parenting styles in predicting positive and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Perfectionism

In general, many people refers perfectionism to a set of self-defeating thoughts and behaviors that concerns with reaching excessively high and unrealistic goals, even in areas in which high performances does not matter. However, Schuler (1999) highlighted theories about perfectionism from the eyes of Maslow (1970), Dabrowski (1972), and Adler (1973), who promotes perfectionism as a positive drive. Maslow (1970) suggested struggle for perfection through self-actualization use one's potential, capabilities, and talents. He also believed that it comes with absence of neurosis. Dabrowski (1972) stated that perfectionism is a driving force that served to promote higher level of development within individual. It is a tool for self-development and not maladjustment. Adler (1973) suggested that perfectionism is a striving to rise above feelings of despair and hopelessness. Conversely,

Hamachek (1978) and Silverman (2007) proposed that perfectionism came with multi facets. For Hamachek (1978), perfectionism is a combination of thoughts and behaviors associated with excessively high standards or expectations for one's own performance and people. It can be divided into three categories, namely healthy or normal perfectionists, neurotic or dysfunctional perfectionists, and non-perfectionists. Healthy or normal perfectionists derive a real sense of pleasure from the labors of a painstaking effort and feel free to be less precise as the situation permits. Neurotic or dysfunctional perfectionists are unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never seem to do things good enough to warrant the feeling. As for Silverman (2007), perfectionism is an energy that can be used either positively or negatively. It all depends on one's level of awareness. When a person feels incapable of meeting the high standards set by the self or by the others, it can cause paralysis and underachievement. However, when a person achieved the high standard, it can lead to extraordinary achievement.

Early conceptualizations suggested that perfectionism is a unidimensional concept (Burns, 1980). However, recent views suggested that perfectionism is multidimensional in nature (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS: Frost et al., 1990) consists of 35 Likert-type items using a five-point scale. It includes six subscales: concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticism, doubts about actions, and organizations. The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS: Hewitt & Flett, 1991) consists of 45 self-report items using 7-point Likert-type scale. MPS has three subscales: self-oriented, socially prescribed, and other-oriented perfectionism. Furthermore, the Almost Perfect Scale- Revised (APSR: Slaney et al., 2001) contains 23 self-report items using 7-point Likert-type scale and it has three subscales: standards, discrepancy, and order. Among these measures, the focus of this study is on the FMPS because it is widely used by researchers in both psychology and gifted education (Mendaglio, 2007).

1.3.2 Academically Gifted and Perfectionism

Academically gifted students differ from average students not only in intellectual development, but also in social and emotional development (Chan, 2010; Silverman, 2007; Tam & Phillipson, 2013). They used to be associated with emotional level that doesn't match logically with their intellectual capabilities, super-sensitivity, and perfectionism (Silverman, 2007). However, perfectionism is more often discussed when it comes to social and emotional development of academically gifted students (Chan, 2010; Maksic & Iwasaki, 2009; Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2009; Portesova & Urbanek, 2013). Perfectionism has been cited as a major characteristic associated with children and adolescents who have been identified as gifted (Kornblum & Ainley, 2005; Silverman, 2007; Wang, Fu, & Rice, 2012). As perfectionism is linked to the pursuit of high and unrealistic goals, which could be destructive and compulsive, and to procrastination and fear of failure, it is understandable that gifted education researchers may regard perfectionism as negative characteristics that must be eliminated if gifted students are to function successfully.

Silverman (2007) suggested that perfectionism was the most noteworthy personality characteristic associated with giftedness. She highlighted six reasons why gifted children are perfectionistic. First, perfection is an abstract concept. It takes an abstract mind to grasp its meaning and to cherish a vision that does not exist in the concrete world. Second, perfectionism is a function of asynchrony or uneven development. Gifted children set standards according to their mental age rather than their chronological age. Third, many gifted children have older playmates, so they tend to set standards appropriate for their more mature friends. Fourth, young gifted children have enough forethought to enable them to be successful in their first attempt at mastery any skill. Fifth, the gifted crave challenge and stimulation, and if schoolwork is too easy they will do whatever they can to complete the task, including trying to accomplish it perfectly. Lastly, perfectionism occurs as a distortion of the drive for self-perfection, which is positive evolutionary drive.

1.3.3 Big Five Factors Personality Traits and Perfectionism

McCrae and Costa (1987) identified Big Five personality factors through varieties of assessment techniques including self-ratings, objective tests, and observers' reports. The Big Five personality factors are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness to experience refers to needs for variety, novelty, and change; conscientiousness refers to strong sense of purpose and high aspiration levels; extraversion refers to preference for companionship and social stimulation; agreeableness refers to willingness to defer to others during interpersonal conflict; while neuroticism refers to tendency to experience dysphonic affect such as sadness, hopelessness, and guilt (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Many literatures indicate that perfectionism is associated with the Big Five personality factors (Dunkley et al., 2006; Khodarahimi, 2010; Navarez & Cayubit, 2011; Ulu & Tezer, 2010). Positive perfectionism was found to be positively related to

conscientiousness and openness to experiences, but negatively associated with neuroticism (Dunkley, Blankstein, Zuroff, Eccle, & Hui, 2006). Negative perfectionism was positively related to neuroticism, but negatively associated to extraversion and agreeableness (Dunkley et al., 2006; Ulu & Tezer, 2010). Khodarihim (2010) found significant negative correlation coefficients between perfectionism, neuroticism, and agreeableness, but no significant correlation coefficients between perfectionism, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness. Navarez & Cayubit (2011) also found the association between doubts about action and neuroticism, and association between positive perfectionism with extraversion and conscientiousness. These results provide consistency in the findings across the studies regarding the positive associations between positive perfectionism and conscientiousness as well as between negative perfectionism and neuroticism.

1.3.4 Parenting Styles and Perfectionism

Many studies have documented that parenting has a powerful influence in child development. Baumrind (1971) highlighted three types of parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Permissive parent attempts to behave in a non-punitive, acceptant and affirmative manner towards the child impulses, desires, and actions. The authoritarian parent attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority. Meanwhile, the authoritative parent attempts to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. Researches have demonstrated the association between parenting styles and perfectionist tendencies in children (Besharat et al., 2011; Kawamura, Frost, & Harmatz, 2002; SpeirsNeumeister, 2004). Positive perfectionist characteristics have proven to be associated with harsh and authoritarian parenting styles (Kawamura et al., 2002), and father's authoritarian style was significantly associated with dimensions perfectionism in their children (Besharat et al., 2011). SpeirsNeumeister (2004) revealed that both authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles are characterized as high in demandingness, and both have been linked to different types of perfectionism, positive perfectionism with authoritative parents and negative perfectionism with authoritarian parents.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This is a descriptive survey research utilizes a correlational approach. The correlational study used to find out how well a set of variables is able to predict a particular outcome, and which variable in a set of variables is the best predictor of an outcome.

2.2 Participants

Four hundred and forty eight academically gifted form 4 students from six schools in Selangor were chosen through cross-sectional random sampling procedures. All of them obtained all A's in their Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) 2011.

2.3 Instrument

Three sets of questionnaires used to collect the data: International Personality Item Pool (IPIP: Goldberg, 1999), Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ: Buri, 1991), and Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS: Frost et al., 1990). All instruments were translated to Bahasa Malaysia using back translations. The IPIP was derived from Big Five personality factors (McCrae & Costa, 1987). It is a 50-item self-report measure of the five personality factors: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The PAQ is designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age). It is a 30-items self-report measure of three subscales (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative). Perceived maternal and paternal parenting styles assessment is identical except for reference to gender. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) is a 35-item self-report measure of perfectionism developed by Frost et al. (1990). As well as providing a total perfectionism score, this measure has six subscales, which are concern over mistakes, parental criticism, parental expectations, personal standards, doubts about actions, and organizations. All instruments were in five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

2.4 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The three instruments used for data collection were adjudged to be valid because the criteria for the validation of instruments such as face, content, and construct validities were ensured by the fact that the items of the questionnaires were adopted from the main theorists' instruments which had being validated. The Cronbach alpha values for each construct of the instruments ranges from .705 to .882.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data for all questionnaires were processed using *Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS)* version 18. K-Mean cluster analysis used to cluster the academically gifted to three clusters (dysfunctional perfectionistic, healthy perfectionistic, and non-perfectionistic). A positive perfectionism mean score is found by calculating the mean of the personal standards and organization subscale, while a negative perfectionism mean score is found by calculating the mean of subscales concern over mistakes, parental expectations, parental criticism, and doubts about actions (Frost et al., 1990; Kornblum & Ainley, 2005). To determine the roles of Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles on predicting positive and negative perfectionism, two stepwise multiple regression analysis were employed.

3. Results

Research question 1: What are clusters of perfectionism being observed among academically gifted students?

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages of clusters of perfectionists.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of clusters of perfectionists

Clusters of Perfectionists	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Dysfunctional/neurotic Perfectionistic)	259	57.8
2 (Non-perfectionistic)	53	11.8
3 (Healthy/normal Perfectionistic)	136	30.4

Based on the findings, 259 (57.8%) students are clustered in dysfunctional/neurotic perfectionistic, 136 (30.4%) students are clustered in healthy/normal perfectionistic, and 53 (11.8%) are clustered in non-perfectionistic.

Research question 2: How well do Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles predict positive and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students?

We conducted two separate stepwise multiple regression analysis to examine how well Big Five personality factors and perceived parenting styles predicted positive and negative perfectionism. Preliminary test on the data showed that the underlying assumptions for the regression analysis were not violated.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis using positive perfectionism as a dependent variable

Variables	B	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Variance (%)
Paternal Authoritative Style	.307	.354	8.590	.000	44.3
Openness to experience	.188	.214	3.715	.000	10.7
Maternal Authoritative Style	.156	.154	2.827	.005	1.7
Conscientiousness	.120	.147	2.428	.016	0.6

In the first analysis, positive perfectionism as measured by the high personal standards and organizations subscales of the MPS was the dependent variable. As shown in Table 2, after all variables were entered into the equation, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 57.3%, $F(4, 443) = 148.541, p < .001$. By analyzing beta values, we saw that in the overall model, paternal authoritative style, openness to experiences, maternal authoritative style, and conscientiousness were significantly and positively predicted positive perfectionism scores: $\beta = .354, p < .001$; $\beta = .214, p < .001$; $\beta = .154, p < .01$; $\beta = .147, p < .05$, respectively.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis using negative perfectionism as a dependent variable

Variables	B	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Variance (%)
Maternal Authoritarian Style	.318	.311	6.331	.000	49.3
Neuroticism	.263	.313	9.383	.000	7.1
Paternal Authoritarian Style	.317	.327	7.089	.000	4.5

In the second regression analysis, negative perfectionism as measured by concern over mistakes, high parental expectations, parental criticism, and doubting of actions subscales was the dependent variable. As shown in

Table 3, after all variables were entered into the equation, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 60.9%, $F(3,444) = 230.289$, $p < .001$. In the overall model, maternal authoritarian style, neuroticism, and paternal authoritarian style were significantly and positively predicted negative perfectionism scores: $\beta = .311$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .313$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .327$, $p < .001$, respectively.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of Big Five personality factors and parenting styles in predicting both positive and negative perfectionism among academically gifted students. K-means cluster analysis clustered academically gifted students to three clusters, namely dysfunctional perfectionistic, healthy perfectionistic, and non-perfectionistic. Based on the percentage values, 57.8% of the sample clustered in dysfunctional perfectionistic, 30.4% clustered in healthy perfectionistic and 11.8% clustered in non-perfectionistic. Kornblum and Ainley (2005) in their study identified 138 (36.8%) academically gifted students clustered in healthy perfectionistic, 223 (36.4%) students clustered in non-perfectionistic, and 154 (25.2%) students clustered in dysfunctional perfectionistic. Previously, Schuler (1999) clustered 65 (58.0%) academically students in healthy perfectionistic, 33 (29.5%) students in dysfunctional perfectionistic, and 14 (12.5%) students in non-perfectionistic. In general, majority of their respondents' scores were in healthy perfectionistic. However, findings in this survey showed different trend as Schuler (1999) and Kornblum and Ainley (2005), where the majority lies in dysfunctional perfectionistic, followed by healthy perfectionistic, and the last were in non-perfectionistic. These findings imply that cultural differences may well exist. The roles of culture of the East are not the same as culture of the West (Afshar et al., 2011; Khodarahimi, 2010; Maksic & Iwasaki, 2009). Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham (2004) also found that Asian American reported more pressure from others to be perfect than did White American. This also suggests that the norm of negative perfectionism for Asians may be quite different from the norm for White samples.

The result of the first regression analysis yielded that positive perfectionism measured by high personal standards and organizations scores of MPS significantly predicted by paternal authoritative style, openness to experiences, conscientiousness, and maternal authoritative style subscales. Findings of the second regression analysis indicated that negative perfectionism as measured by concern over mistakes, high parental expectations, parental criticism, and doubting of actions subscales was predicted by maternal authoritarian style, neuroticism, and paternal authoritarian style. This findings support previous studies that found correlation between positive perfectionism and authoritative parenting style, openness to experience, and conscientiousness; and correlation between negative perfectionism and authoritarian parenting style and neuroticism (Besharat et al., 2011; Biran & Reese, 2007; Kenney-Benson & Pomerantz, 2005; Rudasill, Adelson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013). However, the result of this study showed that academically gifted students have different perceptions towards their parents; where maternal parenting style contributes 49.3% to the development of negative perfectionism and paternal parenting style contribute 44.3% to the development of positive perfectionism. These findings imply that the students linked their authoritarian mothers to the development of their negative perfectionism and their authoritative fathers to development of their positive perfectionism. They perceived that their mothers employed strict discipline, control, demands, and criticize them for any possible mistakes, more than fathers. The different impact of fathers and mothers parenting styles on academically gifted students in this study may partly be explained by the effect of maternal depression and attachment problems on gifted children's socio-emotional adjustment (Wellisch, Brown, & Knight, 2012). As predicted, permissive parenting style showed no contribution in predicting positive and negative perfectionism.

As Silverman (2007) supported the healthy side of perfectionism, further studies should be done not only to students who were clustered in dysfunctional perfectionistic, but also to students who were clustered in non-perfectionistic. Academically gifted students should set high standards for themselves as they have more potential to excel. This research was conducted at six schools in urban areas of Selangor. There is a possibility that different findings would be revealed if the study was done in rural areas. Therefore, for future research it is suggested that schools in rural areas should be included. There is a possibility that students from different backgrounds might have different perceptions and understanding that lead to different results.

In summary, the present result clearly suggests that positive perfectionism was predicted by paternal authoritative style, openness to experiences, conscientiousness, and maternal authoritative style. Furthermore, negative perfectionism was predicted by maternal authoritarian style, neuroticism, and paternal authoritarian style. However, permissive parenting style showed no contribution in predicting positive and negative perfectionism. Parents and teachers are advised to be more understanding, do not expect perfection too much, help their children to set appropriate personal standards, and appreciate their children when they do well. All parties, including parents, teachers, counselors, should be aware of their students' and children's perfectionistic

tendencies as appropriate action should be done to help them to transform their dysfunctional perfectionistic or non-perfectionistic to healthy perfectionistic as healthy perfectionistic will help them strive for excellence. Understanding the role of personality traits, parenting styles and perfectionism should be the first step for further research that will look at other aspects that predict perfectionism among academically gifted students.

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