

Perfectionism and English Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract – The present paper investigates the likely relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning among students of Azad University in Sirjan. To this end, 82 male and female students who were studying English as a general course were chosen randomly to take part in both perfectionism and vocabulary tests. After analyzing the descriptive statistics and applying Kolmogorov – Smirnov, Leven and T-tests, it turned out that there was no meaningful relationship between these two mentioned variables in the considered context or situation.

Keywords: perfectionism, vocabulary learning, correlation coefficient, normality, Leven test, T-test.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is agreed that perfectionism might be a good reason for ordinary people, students, doctors, and anyone else to try their best to achieve their goals. Students at schools may expect themselves or even others they know to be perfect in whatever they do. Teachers want their students to be the best students among all. Parents expect their children to be the best or perfect children for them. Children expect their parents to be the best in the world. Spouses expect each other to have the best behavior with each other. Therefore, it seems perfectionism exists in people's minds everywhere in different forms. However, it may have different reasons, sources or even consequences.

1.1. What is Perfectionism?

Flett and Hewitt (2002) have defined perfectionism as the tendency to set extremely high standards of personal performance. Other perfectionism theorists such as (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate 1990; Hewitt & Flett 1991) have confirmed perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that is comprised of both intrapersonal and interpersonal components.

1.2. Different Kinds of Perfectionism

There are three kinds of perfectionism in all. The first one is called *self-oriented perfectionism* (which is high self-standards and motivation) and two interpersonal dimensions described as *other-oriented perfectionism* and *socially prescribed perfectionism* (Hewitt & Flett 1991). People who tend to have other-oriented perfectionism, have high standards for others while

socially prescribed perfectionism means people or somebody wants or expects them to be perfect.

1.3. Negative and Positive Facets of Perfectionism

According to Blatt (1995), it seems perfectionism can be related to both conscientiousness and neuroticism. When it comes to conscientiousness, it means an individual strives to achieve success in what they do and they have high expectations from themselves regarding their jobs or studies. On the other hand, perfectionism can lead to neuroticism in that after a person determines high standards for themselves, it can push the individual towards high self-evaluation and self-criticism following by stress and neuroticism. Conscientiousness and neuroticism can be changed or moderated into positive facets of perfectionism as long as the individual tries to avoid excessiveness or dissipation. Any person can have normal behaviors in every situation. If an individual tries to strive reasonably for a goal, the conscientiousness trait belonging to that person can be called "*Personal Standards Perfectionism*" (or perfectionistic striving) and also the neuroticism trait can be called "*Self-critical Perfectionism*" (or perfectionistic concerns). (Stoeber & Otto 2006).

1.4. The Relation between Perfectionism and Academic Achievement

As Slaney, Ashby and Trippi (1995) have reported, researchers have done a large number of studies to determine if there is a relation between perfectionism and individuals' performance in college or at their jobs in terms of success, productivity and satisfaction. Not surprisingly, the results have confirmed that positive aspects of perfectionism that is perfectionistic striving has had a positive correlation with self-efficacy and academic performance whereas negative aspects of perfectionism which is the self-critical one affected individuals' performance negatively (Chang 2006; Stoeber, Feast & Hayward 2009; Stoeber et al. 2008).

1.5. Perfectionism and Motivation

Hewitt and Flett (1991) have asserted motivational aspects of perfectionism can be a good explanation for adaptive behaviors along with self-oriented perfectionism. An individual with high self-oriented perfectionism determines some goals to achieve and then tries their best to meet those goals. Bandura (1989) has related this self-oriented perfectionism to the individual's intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, Deci and Ryan (1985) have confirmed the socially prescribed perfectionism is related to the individual's extrinsic motivation which takes root from the need to make others pleased and to avoid punishment.

1.6. Perfectionism and Achievement Goals

Elliot and Niesta (2009) define achievement goals as mental representations which an individual accepts as their approach towards achieving their goals. For instance students studying in a college may have different feelings or approaches while studying a course and they make use of various strategies to help them make it easier. Namely, if a student tries enough to acquire a desired outcome at the end of his course, their approach is called "*mastery approach goals*" while some students pay more attention to their performance during a course and that is why they try to keep quiet in class in order not to make any mistakes. This strategy

is called “*mastery avoidance goals*”. Some students feel satisfied with defeating their classmates which confirms their attitude or approach is “*performance approach goals*”. A group of students prefer not to be very active in class in order to prevent poor performance in front of their classmates whose behavior is called “*performance avoidance goals*”. Verner-Filion and Gaudreau (2010) have conducted a research to find out the relation between perfectionism and achievement goals. According to the results of this research, performance-approach goal partially helped and mediated the relation between self-oriented perfectionism and academic achievement. Mastery-approach goal was completely a mediator between self-oriented perfectionism and academic satisfaction. In addition, performance-approach goal was a partial mediator between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic achievement. However, the negative relation between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic satisfaction was partially mediated by mastery-approach goal.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this research a number of processes were followed. The subjects participating in this study were 82 students who were studying general English in Azad university of Sirjan. All the participants were one of the researchers’ students and they were all randomly chosen to take part in this study. They were both male and female students but the number of female students was only 21. First of all the students were provided by perfectionism scale questionnaire by (Hewitt & Flett 1990) consisting of 45 statements asking students to mention their agreement or disagreement. Because this questionnaire was a standard one, its reliability and validity had been measured before. Following that the students were given a list of English vocabulary from their English book titled “a general English course for university students” by Keshavarz and Porkar (2011) to translate in Persian. After the papers were collected, their descriptive statistics were calculated in terms of the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, minimum and maximum scores. Afterwards the Kolmogorov – Smirnov test was applied to check normality of the variables which confirmed normality of the perfectionism variable but it rejected normality of the English vocabulary variable. Three hypotheses were considered to be investigated in this study. They are as follows respectively.

1. There is a meaningful relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning.
2. Perfectionism variable is different between men and women.
3. English vocabulary learning is different between men and women.

To test the first hypothesis, Kendall & Spearman correlation coefficients were applied because one of the variables was not normal and to test the second and third hypotheses, Leven test was used to compare the variances while the T-test was used to compare the means.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Description of Perfectionism Variable

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of perfectionism variable. Also table No.1 shows the boxplot and histogram belonging to the perfectionism variable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Perfectionism Variable

	mean	median	SD	skewness	kurtosis	minimum	maximum
perfectionism	214.83	217.50	26.284	-0.008	0.681	160	303

According to Table 1, the mean belonging to perfectionism variable is 214.83, the median is 217.50, the standard deviation is 26.284, the skewness is 0.008, the kurtosis is 0.681, the minimum is 160 and the maximum is 303. Also figure 1 shows the histogram and boxplot for perfectionism variable.

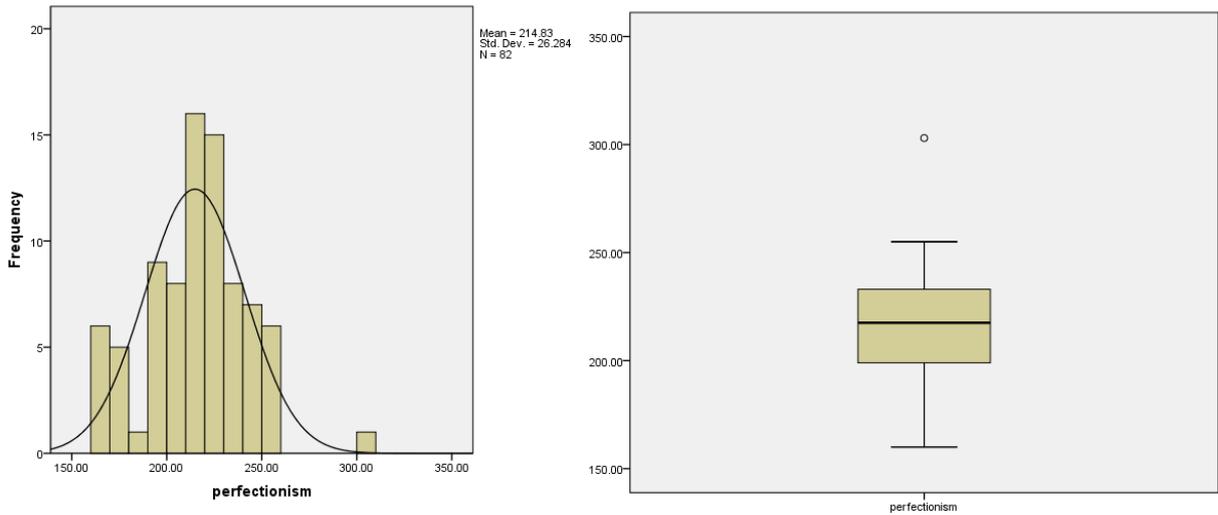


Figure 1: The Histogram and the Boxplot for Perfectionism Variable

3.2. Description of English vocabulary learning variable

Table 2 consists of descriptive statistics belonging to the vocabulary learning variable.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Variable of English Vocabulary Learning

	mean	median	SD	skewness	kurtosis	minimum	maximum
English vocabulary learning	16.79	17.00	2.734	-1.352	1.902	7	20

According to Table 2, the mean belonging to the English vocabulary variable is 16.79, the median is 17.00, the standard deviation is 2.734, the skewness is -1.352, the kurtosis is 1.902, the minimum is 7 and the maximum is 20. Also figure 2 shows the histogram and the boxplot belonging to the English vocabulary learning.

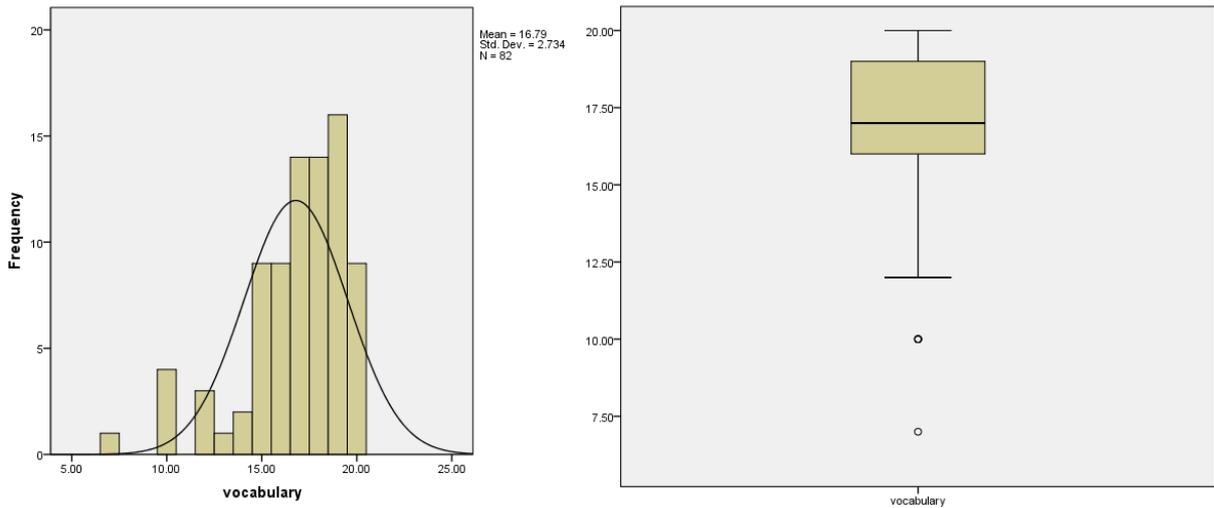


Figure 2: The Histogram and the Boxplot Belonging to English Vocabulary Learning

3.3. Kolmogorov – Smirnov test

The Kolmogorov – Smirnov test was used to check normality of the variables in order to investigate the research hypotheses. Table 3 shows the results of this test.

Table 3: Kolmogorov – Smirnov test

variable	procrastination	English vocabulary
number	82	82
mean	214.83	16.79
SD	26.28	2.73
Z score	0.964	1.599
Significance level P-value	0.311	0.012

According to Table 3 which shows the results of the Kolmogorov – Smirnov test and whose significance level for perfectionism is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis of normality of this variable is accepted. Although since the P-value or the significance level for the English vocabulary variable is less than 0.05, the normality hypothesis is rejected for this variable. Because the hypothesis of normality is rejected for the English vocabulary, Spearman and Kendall correlation coefficient will be used to investigate the research hypotheses.

3.4. Hypothesis No.1

There is a meaningful relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning.

Kendall and Spearman correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning which are quantitative and non-parametric variables. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: The Correlation Coefficients between Perfectionism and English Vocabulary Learning

Name of the correlation	Correlation coefficient	P-value	number	Relationship between variables
Kendall	0.127	0.112	82	none
Spearman	0.175	0.116	82	none

According to the obtained results from the correlation coefficients in the table above, the significant level in both tests is greater than 0.05. Therefore, there is no relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning variables because p-value is greater than 0.05, therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected. Figure 3 which shows the scatter plot for the mentioned tests, confirms the results.

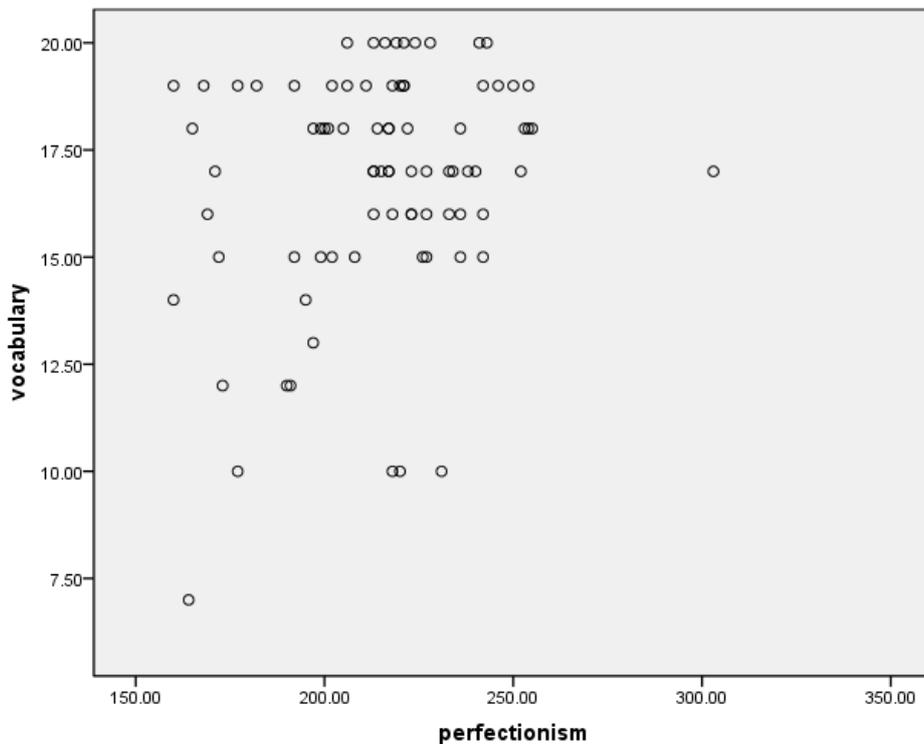


Figure 3: The Scatter Plot for Correlation Coefficients between Perfectionism and English Vocabulary Learning

3.5. Hypothesis No.2

The perfectionism variable is different between men and women.

Based on the results of Table 5, the p-value obtained from the Levene test equals 0.740 and because it is greater than 0.05, we can apply the T-test based on the hypothesis that variances are the same for men and women. Comparison of means shows that the mean belonging to perfectionism for men is by 8.54 greater than the one belonging to women. However, this difference cannot be considered important in terms of statistics because the P-value obtained from the T-test is greater than 0.05. In addition, figure 4 shows the boxplot belonging to perfectionism variable for men and women in which the lack of difference between the genders is clear.

Table 5: Leven Test and T-Test for Perfectionism Variable in Terms of Gender

Statistics	test	Leven test		T-test			
	hypothesis	F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean differences
Perfectionism	Equality of variances	0.111	0.740	-1.289	80	0.201	8.54
	Inequality of variances			-1.287	34.658	0.207	8.54

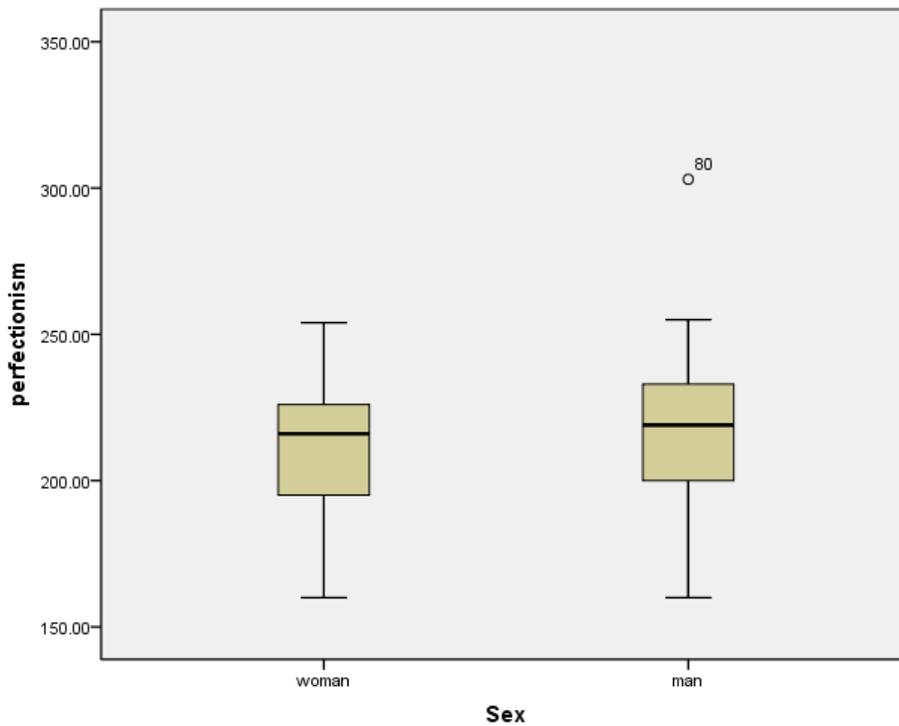


Figure 4: The Boxplot of Perfectionism Variable in Terms of Gender

3.6. Hypothesis No.3

English vocabulary learning is different between men and women.

Based on the results of Table 6, the P-value obtained from Leven test is 0.815 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, we can apply the T-test based on the hypothesis that the variances are the same in both groups of men and women. The comparison of means shows that the mean belonging to English vocabulary variable among men is by 0.233 greater than the one belonging to women but this difference is not meaningful because the P-value obtained from the T-test is greater than 0.05. Besides, figure 5 shows the boxplot of English vocabulary learning for men and women and it confirms the lack of difference between both groups of men and women.

Table 6: Leven Test and T-Test for English Vocabulary Learning Variable in Terms of Gender

Statistics	test	Leven test		T-test			
	hypothesis	F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean differences
English vocabulary learning	Equality of variances	0.055	0.815	-0.336	80	0.738	0.233
	Inequality of variances			-0.360	39.775	0.721	0.233

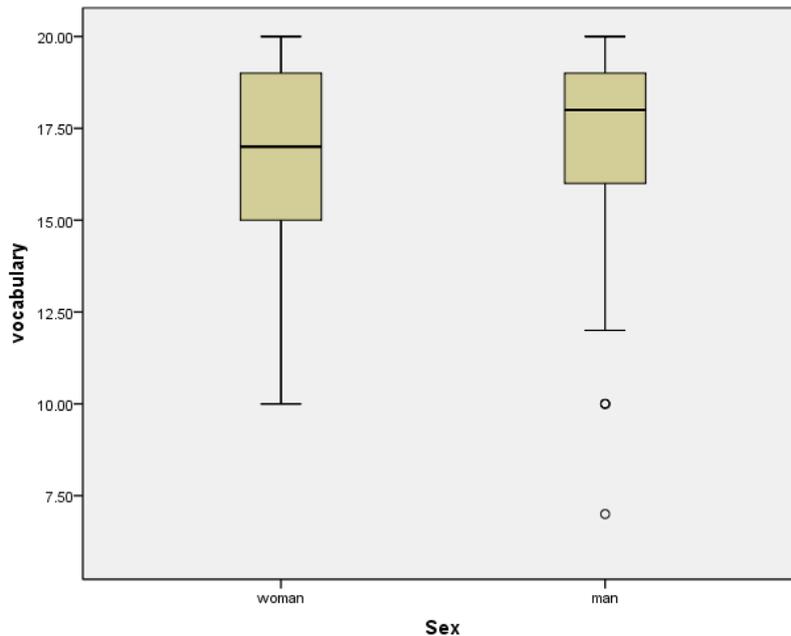


Figure 5: The Boxplot Belonging to English Vocabulary Learning in Terms of gender

4. CONCLUSION

There are a large number of people who like to have a perfect life from various aspects such as their studies, their jobs, their marriage and so on. However, there exist some people who never care about what happens to them during their lives and they just accept whatever happens to them without even bothering about trying to change the undesired situations in their lives. Perfectionism can be considered a positive personal trait especially for students because it acts like a force which pushes them to try more and more until they achieve their goals. However, perfectionism can change into a negative personal trait as well where some students start seeing things as only black and white or as accepted or rejected. For instance if they do not get accepted in their favorite course at university, they decide to stop studying forever. This is not a normal point of view and although perfectionism can be admired but it must be controlled in a balanced way. Teachers have this opportunity to inform their students of positive and negative aspects of perfectionism because they see their students in the real context of studying and understand how their students are competing with peers and how stressful that can be at times. In this paper it is confirmed that there is no meaningful relationship between perfectionism and English vocabulary learning although perfectionism is normally supposed to affect students' performance positively, there might be other factors which affect students' performance differently in different contexts which could be unseen or hard to control.

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