

The Effect of Academic Perfectionism and Social Support from Friends on University Students' Fear of Failure

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Abstract

Within the context of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion (CMR), current research has examined the relationships between academic perfectionism, social support from friends, and fear of failure in university students. 372 university students (73.5% were female, 26.5% were male) voluntarily completed the questionnaires. The results showed positive relationships between academic perfectionism and fear of failure. In addition, social support from friends and fear of failure were negatively related. Furthermore, as a result of the structural equation modeling applied to determine the relationships between latent variables, it was determined that academic perfectionism predicted fear of failure positively and support from friends negatively. Our findings provide important evidence that academic perfectionism and social support from friends can influence fears of failure in university students.

Keywords: Academic Perfectionism, Social Support from Friends, Fear of Failure

Introduction

University students sometimes encounter some factors that make it difficult for them to adapt to school. Among these factors, there are common difficulties in adapting to university life, economic problems, accommodation, and academic difficulties (Bülbül & Acar- Güvendir, 2014; Donat et al., 2019). Studies show that there is a general increase in the symptoms of mental disorders in university students (Haghbin et al., 2012; Hjeltnes et al., 2015). Especially exams, graduation projects, and other assignments are reported as one of the most fear-inducing events among university students (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Brady et al., 2018).

Students may experience different levels of fear of failure during a given exam. Fear of failure can be defined as the avoidance of a negative outcome or experience of failure (Elliot & McGregor, 1999). Fear of failure is accepted as an important problem for university students (Martins, et al., 2018). While individuals with a high fear of failure show a low level of motivational orientation in the jobs, they are responsible for, individuals with a low level of fear display a more willing attitude (Çam, 2016). Those with a fear of failure may be unsure of their ability to succeed because they have low self-esteem. Moreover, those who have a fear of failure often attribute negative consequences to the experience of failing at a particular task (Nelson et al., 2013). A previous study has shown that there is a negative relationship between fear of failure and self-esteem in university students (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). In addition, studies have found that fear of failure hurts students' career adaptability

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(Chuang et al., 2022), academic coping (Tao et al., 2022), and self-worth perceptions (Balkis & Duru, 2012).

Fear of failure can lead to associating failure with undesirable outcomes, and individuals with high levels of fear are typically more likely to perceive failure as a threatening risk situation in assessment situations. Therefore, in this study, we focused separately on protective and risk factors that may be associated with fear of failure.

Social Support from Friends and Fear of Failure

Social support can be defined as the state of providing psychological, physical, financial, or other support by family members, friends, and close special someone available at the time of need (Amoah, 2019). The relative effect and importance of friend support, which is an important dimension of social support, compared to family and other special people have been proven in different studies (Griffin et al., 2006; Nguyen et al., 2019). More specifically, researchers have shown that in young adults, social support provided in an individual's friend network can have positive effects (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Holliman, et al., 2021).

Friends can influence social support, motivation for academic achievement, increased participation in learning activities, and good behavior of students (Tomás et al., 2020). Individuals with high fear of failure may experience more embarrassment and embarrassment over unsuccessful results. The belief that one has poor ability and control over one's academic performance can harm one's interactions with others. As a result, less social and tolerant behavior toward people can be seen (Sagar et al., 2011). Therefore, social support from friends as an interpersonal regulatory strategy can be effective in reducing the fear of failure. Joseph et al. (2021) showed that strategies such as going out with friends and sharing in the face of personal problems significantly affect failure anxiety. Vaughn et al. (2023) found that effortful praise from peers was effective in overcoming fear of failure.

However, theoretical models emphasize that the support offered by close friends is a universal need for all people (Brannan et al., 2013). For CMR, a threatening factor from the immediate environment may activate beliefs or cognitive schemas about the negative consequences of failure, resulting in fear of failure (Lazarus, 1991). Worrying about losing the interest of close friends due to bad results can further increase the fear of failure. Therefore, the high social support individuals feel from their close friends can be seen as a protective factor against the fear of failure.

Academic Perfectionism and Fear of Failure

Academic perfectionism is a concept that includes high concerns and doubts about making mistakes in academic environments (Malik & Ghayas, 2016). Perfectionist individuals set high standards that are hard to reach and often experience disappointment when they cannot reach these standards (Bong et al., 2014). For this reason, academic perfectionist students may feel an intense fear of failure. In general, the fear of failure in academic perfectionist students includes not feeling disappointed again and feeling guilty (Cacciotti et al., 2016). Sudirman et al. (2023) showed that there is a positive relationship between academic perfectionism and fear of failure. Besides, other studies have proven positive relationships between perfectionism and academic procrastination (Abdollahi et al., 2020), poor academic performance (Choo & Prihadi, 2019), and test anxiety (Eum & Rice, 2011).

According to the CMR (Lazarus, 1991), in the face of a threat, people adjust their coping responses according to personal goals and evaluation processes for coping potential. However, when perfectionist students encounter failure to achieve expected performance, they tend to attribute failure to inadequacy rather than lack of effort. Moreover, these students often experience a fear of failing in every academic endeavor they pursue by making a negative self-evaluation of poor performance. Therefore, it is assumed that increasing academic perfectionist approaches are positively associated with fear of failure.

Present Study

University students face various problems such as the necessity of success, future anxiety, and professional gain. They also face emotional, social, economic, and academic problems that may affect their learning abilities and academic performance (Anuradha et al., 2017). Especially the fear of failure can be considered an important problem among the academic problems experienced by university students. However, fear of failure among students in Turkey is a relatively understudied topic. Moreover, there are limited studies on the predisposing and preventive variables of fear of failure (Mokbul et al., 2023). Therefore, in this study, the relationship between social support from friends (protective factor) and academic perfectionism (risk factor) with fear of failure was examined.

On the other hand, although the conclusion that social support affects fear of failure is widely accepted, the focus of most social support research has been high school students (Agbaria & Bdier, 2020; Flett et al., 2012). Such limited focus can be problematic when generalizing to other student groups. In addition, when the studies are examined, it is seen that a limited number of hypotheses have been formed between the social support provided by the friend and the fear of failure. Therefore, there is a need for research that directly examines how peer support contributes to reducing the fear of failure.

However, previous studies have confirmed that perfectionism is associated with a fear of failure (Conroy et al., 2007; Sunkarapalli & Agarwal, 2017). In particular, no study has been found in a single study that simultaneously addresses the relationship of both peer social support and academic perfectionism with fear of failure. Thus, simultaneously investigating the effects of peer support and academic perfectionism on the fear of failure may help us better understand the risk and protective mechanisms underlying the fear of failure. Based on previous findings, this study aims to examine the relationship between academic perfectionism and friend social support, and fear of failure in university students. The hypotheses are presented below:

H1: Academic perfectionism is positively associated with fear of failure.

H2: Social support from friends is negatively associated with fear of failure.

Method

Research Model

Since this study aimed to determine the relationships between the variables, from general scanning models to relational scanning models was used. Relational screening is a method that aims to detect the relationships between at least two or more variables and the degrees of these relationships (Karasar, 2011). In this direction, the predictive relationship between academic perfectionism and the social support of friends was examined by structural equation modeling. Structural equation modeling is a

statistical method used to test models that contain causal relationships and correlation relationships between observed variables and latent variables (Dursun & Kocagöz, 2010).

Participants

The participants of this research consisted of 374 [275 females (73.5%) and 99 males (26.5%)] university students. In addition, 124 students from the Faculty of Education (33.33%), 145 students from the Faculty of Letters (38.98%), 50 students from the Faculty of Health Sciences (13.44%), 53 students from the Faculty of Economics (14.25%) continue their education.

Measures

Academic Perfectionism Scale (APS)

The APS was developed by Odacı et al. (2017). The scale consists of 13 items and 3 subscales ("Self-Doubt", "Comparison" and "Idealization"). Each item in the scale is evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree). High scores on the scale show that academic perfectionism is high. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as .77 for the entire scale.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The MSPSS was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was carried out by Eker and Arkar (1995). In addition, this scale consists of 12 items and 3 subscales ("Family Support", "Friend Support" and "Support from a Significant Other"). Scale items are evaluated as a 7-point Likert (1 = Definitely not, 7 = Definitely yes). In this study, the 4-item "Friend Support" subscale was used. High scores indicate high perceived social support from friends. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha value for the friend support subscale was .91.

Fear of Failure Scale

The scale was developed by Kandemir and Hayran (2019). At the same time, the scale has a total of 17 items and a one-dimensional structure. Scale items are evaluated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all suitable for me, 4 = Completely suitable for me). High scores obtained on the scale scoring indicate that the fear of failure is high. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was calculated as .84.

Procedure

The online questionnaires prepared through the Google Forms platform were distributed to the students who voluntarily participated in the research, via social media (Whatsapp, Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook) using the snowball method. The approval of the ethics committee for this study was obtained from Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University Scientific Research Ethics Committee (Decision No: E-95531838-050.99-80731, 192). In addition, the participants were asked to share the link to the survey web page among their acquaintances. The questionnaire was created in such a way that a participant could only submit one form and proceed to the questions after giving informed consent. In the informed consent form, information about the purpose of the study, its operation, and the average time of completing the questionnaire were given. Added the information that participation in the questionnaire is completely voluntary and will only be analyzed at the group level.

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics were reported. Correlation analysis was then conducted to examine the relationship between depression, life satisfaction, meaning of life, and strategies for coping with earthquake stress. In addition, structural equation modeling was used to determine the relationships between latent variables. In the analysis of the data, the correlation matrix in SPSS 20 and structural equation modeling in Lisrel 8.80 were used.

Findings

Preliminary Analyses

The fact that the skewness and kurtosis values of the research variables change between -1.05 and .56 indicates that the data meet the necessary criteria to meet the normality assumption (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013). On the other hand, correlation results show that fear of failure is positively associated with academic perfectionism ($r = .67, p < .001$) and negatively correlated with peer social support ($r = -.18, p < .001$). Descriptive statistics and correlation results are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Between the Variables

	1	2	3
1. Fear of Failure	1		
2. Academic Perfectionism	.67*	1	
3. Friend Social Support	-.18*	-.10*	1
\bar{X}	33.24	35.49	21.36
SD	8.24	7.92	6.43
Skewness	.56	.04	-1.05
Kurtosis	.50	.30	.42

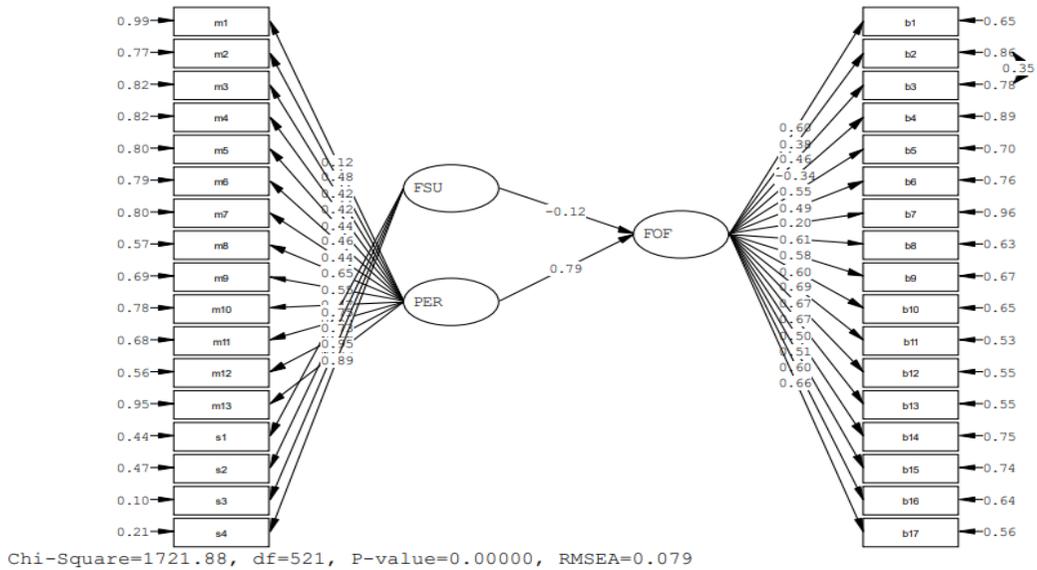
Note. * $p < .01$, N = 372

Findings on the Prediction of Fear of Failure

In this part, it was tested whether academic perfectionism and peer social support predicted fear of failure at a significant level. Figure 1 shows the standardized values.

Figure 1

Standardized Coefficients for the Structural Equation Model Between Academic Perfectionism and Social Support of Peers and Fear of Failure

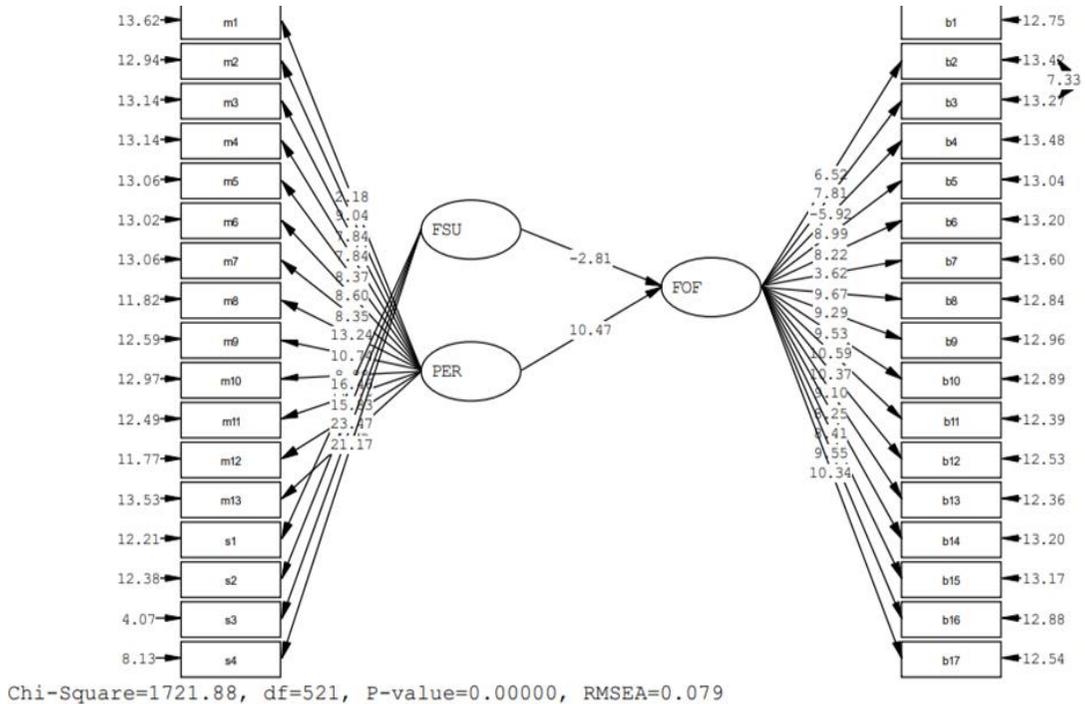


Note; PER: Akademik Perfectionism, FSU: Friends Social Support, FOF: Fear of Failure

When the standardized coefficients for the structural equation model are examined, it is observed that academic perfectionism predicts fear of failure ($\beta = .79$) positively, and support from friends ($\beta = -.12$) negatively. The t-values of the model are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

T-values for the Structural Equation Model Between Academic Perfectionism and Social Support of Friends and Fear of Failure



Discussion

Social support from friends was negatively associated with fear of failure, consistent with previous research (Misra et al., 2003; Timmermans, 2020). Accordingly, university students who cannot receive the social support they desire from their friends may experience fear of failure in assessment situations. Hepper et al. (2013) determined that the fear of failure is higher in students who have more limited social connections regarding intercultural contexts. In another study, Nakhla (2019) reported that individuals who provided the support they needed from their close friends had lower fear of failure. In terms of CMR, negative interactions between individuals and their immediate environment can trigger stress and fear. As a coping strategy with stress, the support of friends can make it easier for individuals to cope with stress factors in academic environments and prevent fear of failure.

As a result of another finding of the study, it was determined that academic perfectionism was negatively related to fear of failure. According to this result, academic perfectionist attitudes and approaches can increase students' fear of failure. The constant self-criticism that results from not reaching high standards in perfectionist students can precipitate guilt and fear that can result in academic failure. Previous studies have shown that there are significant relationships between perfectionism and fear of failure (Pamungkas & Muhid, 2020; Yosopov, 2020). For example, Mansouri et

al. (2022) stated that there is a positive and significant relationship between perfectionism and fear of failure in university students.

In terms of CMR, emotions are considered to arise from the interdependent effects of the primary and secondary appraisal of meaningful events (Lazarus, 2000). The primary appraisal addresses whether a situation is personally relevant, while the secondary appraisal represents an appraisal of the perceived coping options that underpin subsequent behavior. Academic perfectionist students' feelings about academic success are complex. Although perfectionist students try to control themselves before the exam, failure may be perceived as a threat as the exam approaches. This can lead to impaired concentration and impaired performance. Poor performance and fear of failure supported by intense stress can make it difficult to make decisions and apply skills in the next academic process.

Limitations and Other Future Directions

The findings of this study should be evaluated in the context of some limitations. First, this study was prepared with a cross-sectional design. Since the cross-sectional study has the limitation of providing causal relationships between variables, more relative longitudinal studies are needed to confirm the relationships. Second, the fear of failure includes various factors that were not measured in this study, such as anger, stress, and anxiety. Future studies may consider examining the relationship between the dimensions of anger, stress, and anxiety, as well as academic perfectionism, peer social support, and fear of failure. Third, our study focused only on a limited sample of faculties. Therefore, future studies should examine whether the findings generalize to student groups in other faculties.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between academic perfectionism and social support from friends and fear of failure in university students. In addition, this study revealed that academic perfectionism was a positive predictor of fear of failure and a negative predictor of social support from friends. Accordingly, it is important to teach university students to develop better strategies to reduce academic perfectionist feelings and thoughts to effectively cope with their fear of failure. Likewise, social support from friends should be sustainable to reduce the fear of failure. Otherwise, the fear of failure harms the general well-being of the students and can lead to more serious problems such as school burnout and dropping out of the university.

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