



## AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN 8<sup>th</sup> GRADE STUDENTS' LEVEL OF ACADEMIC RISK TAKING AND THEIR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERFECTIONISM TRAITS

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the relationship between positive and negative perfectionism traits and academic risk taking levels of 8th grade students. For this purpose relational model was used in the study. The sample was consisted of 216 Primary School students (114 girls and 102 boys) attending 8th grade during 2011-2012 academic year first semester in Battalgazi-Malatya. "Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale" developed by Kırdök (2004) to determine traits of students' positive and negative perfectionism and "Academic Risk Taking Scale" developed by Clifford (1991) and was adapted to Turkish by Korkmaz (2002) to determine students' academic risk taking levels were used. The obtained data were analyzed by means of SPSS 17.0 package program. To analyze the obtained data Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used. According to the results obtained from the study it was found that there is a significant and positive relationship between positive and negative perfectionism and academic risk taking levels of students. It is determined that there is a significant and negative relationship between students' negative perfectionism traits and their academic risk taking levels.

**Keywords:** Positive and negative perfectionism, academic risk taking, 8th grade students.

### INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism can be defined as the process of endeavoring for perfection, setting high standards and evaluating ones' own successes according to these standards (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990; Slaney, Rice & Ashby, 2002). This process may cause both positive and negative effects on students' feelings and behaviors (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). This creates the need to examine perfectionism as a two-dimensional concept as positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Hamacheck, 1978; Kirdok, 2004; Rheume, Ladouceur & Freeston, 2000; Stumpf & Parker, 2000; Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). If perfectionism leads to positive effects, by playing a triggering role on the efforts of the student (Kottman & Ashby, 2000), it is called as positive perfectionism (Hamacheck, 1978; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Positive perfectionist students are individuals with developed self esteem (Hamacheck, 1978). Putting in effort to achieve the realistic targets they set (Ens, Cox & Clara, 2002; Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Rice, Ashby & Slaney, 1998) these students feel happiness when they successfully complete the process. Positive perfectionists also are capable of confronting the personal and environmental restrictions that may obstruct them in achieving their targets with maturity (Hamachek, 1978). On the other hand, by causing the student to focus on failures (Parker, 1997; Rice, Lopez & Vergara, 2005), perfectionism can bring along negative effects such as low motivation (Bieling, Israeli, Smith & Antony, 2003), high levels of anxiety (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a, 1991b; Kottman & Ashby, 2000; Shafran & Mansell, 2001; Slaney & Ashby, 1996; Stoeber & Otto, 2006), postponement (Ferrari, 1992; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Rice &

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Mirzadeh, 2000; Slaney & Ashby, 1996) and avoidance (Bieling, Israeli & Antony, 2004; Hamachek, 1978; Slade & Owens, 1998; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade & Dewey, 1995). This situation is referred to as negative perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Rice & Ashby, 2007). Negative perfectionist students set unrealistic targets (Borynack, 2003; Burns, 1980; Ens, Cox & Clara, 2002; Hamachek, 1978; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b) and are motivated with the fear of failure and social criticism (Blackburn, 2003). Exhibiting an excessive level of self-critical attitude (Hamachek, 1978; Kottman & Ashby, 2000; Rice & Ashby, 2007; Rice, Lopez & Vergara, 2005), these students blame themselves in the face of the failures they face while trying to achieve the high standards they had set (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Hamachek, 1978; Kottman & Ashby, 2000; Pacht, 1984; Parker & Adkins, 1995; Rice & Ashby, 2007).

In addition to the positive and negative perfectionist traits, another important factor that affects students' behaviors within the class environment is their behavior of academic risk taking. Academic risk taking behavior defines students' courage and eagerness/reluctance to struggle with the difficulties they face within their learning environment (Korkmaz, 2002). Academic risk taking behavior has a four dimensional structure as the tendency of recovering and being active again following a failure, the tendency of having negative feelings after a failure, tendency to prefer difficult tasks and tendency of not doing homework (Korkmaz, 2002). It is possible to assert that while the students with tendencies of being negative and not doing their homework after a failure have low levels of academic risk taking, while the students that tend to recover, be active and prefer difficult tasks are willing to take academic risks. Students with high levels of academic risk taking;

- are willing to participate in the activities that take place within the class environment, even if there is a possibility of failure (Strum, 1971),
- have high motivation within the learning environment,
- enjoy the learning process (House, 2002),
- have low levels of learned helplessness,
- do not have difficulty in exhibiting their potentials,
- act bravely in taking important decisions (Esen Kiran, 2005; Neihart, 2010).

Consequently it can be asserted that, the students that are willing to take academic risk within the learning environment have advantage in achieving success over the students that are reluctant to do so (Clifford, 1991; Clifford & Chou, 1991; House, 2002). In this context, it is considered that supporting academic risk taking behaviors is significantly important in providing contribution to students' academic achievements. Determination of the variables that affect academic risk taking behavior, and the direction and extent of these effects can provide guidance on supporting academic risk taking behaviors of students. Examining the literature indicates that perfectionist personality traits play a decisive role on students' behaviors when a new and risky situation is faced (Erol, 2011; Roedell 1984). This gives rise to the thought that academic risk taking behaviors are influenced by perfectionist personality traits. However, no study that manifests the level and direction of the effects of students' positive and negative perfectionism traits on their academic risk taking behaviors could be found in the literature. In consideration of this, this study aims to examine the relation between 8th grade students' academic risk taking levels and their positive and negative perfectionism traits.

## **METHOD**

In the present study, which aims at examining the relation between 8th grade students' academic risk taking levels and their positive and negative perfectionism traits, relational screening model was used. Relational screening models are the study patterns that determine the presence and level of joint variances between two or more variables (Karasar, 2009).

### **Participants**

The study group of the study consists of 216 students, as 114 (52.8%) female and 102 (47.2%) male students, attending to the 8th grade in four different primary schools in the Battalgazi County of the city of Malatya during the Fall Season of the 2011-2012 Educational Year.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The data for the study were collected through the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale and Academic Risk Taking Scale.

*The Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale:* Developed by Kirdok (2004), the scale contains a total of 17 items-10 in the dimension “positive perfectionism” and 7 in the dimension “negative perfectionism”. The validity of the scale was tested on secondary students by the author, who found that the scale had two factors, namely positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism. He noted that the items in positive perfectionism had factor loadings ranging from 0.47 to 0.64. The sub-dimension accounted for 18.22% of the total variance. On the other hand, he reported that the items in negative perfectionism had factor loadings varying between 0.52 and 0.64. The sub-dimension accounted for 14.22% of the total variance. Furthermore, the author tested the reliability of the scale. He discovered that Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were 0.81 and 0.78 for positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism respectively.

Though originally a four-point Likert type scale, the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale was used in the present study as a five-point Likert type scale in order to make sure that both the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale and Academic Risk-Taking Scale had a similar rating principle. Since the scale was converted into one with a different rating than the original form, it was necessary to conduct validity and reliability analyzes again. The factor analysis yielded a two-factor structure that accounted for 38.01% of the total variance. It was observed that the items in the factors were in perfect harmony with the original form. According to the factor analysis, the items in positive perfectionism had factor loadings ranging from 0.50 and 0.71 and the sub-dimension accounted for 23.95% of the total variance. Sample Item: I try to do my tasks regularly. On the other hand, the items in negative perfectionism had factor loadings varying between 0.34 and 0.51 and the sub-dimension accounted for 14.06% of the total variance. Sample Item: It is embarrassing when others notice my weaknesses. As for the reliability of the new form, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were 0.82 and 0.74 for positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism respectively. It is acknowledged that scales with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and higher are reliable (Buyukozturk, 2010; Pallant, 2005; Tezbasaran, 1997). Therefore, the sub-dimensions positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism are sufficiently reliable.

*The Academic Risk-Taking Scale:* Designed by Clifford (1991) and translated into Turkish by Korkmaz (2002), the scale measures students’ courage and willingness/reluctance to cope with difficulties during the educational process. The scale, a five-point Likert type one, scale contains a total of 36 items. The original form consists of three sub-dimensions, namely Tendency to Recovery and Activity Following Failure, Tendency to Difficult Tasks and Tendency to Negativity Following Failure. While adapting the scale to Turkish, Korkmaz added an additional dimension called Tendency to Skipping Homework. In the Turkish version, 11 items are included in the dimension “Tendency to Recovery and Activity Following Failure”. Sample Item: Should I get a low grade at school, I work on my mistakes and attempt to deal with the questions again. The second dimension, tendency to difficult tasks, contains 10 items. Sample Item: Difficult school assignments are more entertaining than easy ones. There are 12 items in the third dimension, tendency to negativity following failure. Sample Item: I get discouraged if I make a mistake in a subject that I have been trying to learn about. The additional dimension, tendency to skipping homework, contains three items. Sample Item: If my school assignment is difficult, I attempt to pass the class without doing it. One can get either separate scores for each sub-dimension or a total score for the whole scale. In addition, Korkmaz (2002) tested the reliability of the Turkish version on both university students and primary school students. The internal consistency coefficients were 0.89 and 0.90 for the

former and latter respectively. The reliability coefficient for the academic risk taking scale as a whole was 0.81. The internal consistency coefficients were 0.75, 0.74, 0.79 and 0.63 for the sub-dimensions tendency to recovery and activity following failure, tendency to difficult tasks, tendency to negativity following failure and tendency to skipping homework respectively. It is acknowledged that scales with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and higher are reliable (Buyukozturk, 2010; Pallant, 2005; Tezbasaran, 1997). This criterion is satisfied by the scale as a whole and all the sub-dimensions except for the tendency to skipping homework. However, the additional sub-dimension can also be argued to be reliable, for it is acknowledged that it is enough for scales with a small number of items to have a reliability coefficient of 0.60 and higher (Sipahi, Yurtkoru & Cinko, 2010).

### Data Analysis

Data of the study were analyzed by utilizing SPSS 17.0 package program. The relation between students' academic risk taking levels and their positive and negative perfectionism traits was examined by means of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation.

### FINDINGS

The results obtained from the study are presented herein below. At first the scores the students obtained from the whole of the Academic Risk Taking Scale, from the subscales of the negativity after failure tendency, the recovery and being active after failure tendency, the engagement in difficult tasks tendency and the tendency to not doing homework, and the points scored from the positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism subscales of the "Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale" were determined. After this determination, the correlations between the determined scores were examined with the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and the resulting findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Examination of the Relation between Academic Risk Taking Levels and Positive and Negative Perfectionism Traits

	Positive Perfectionism	Negative Perfectionism
Negativity After Failure Tendency	$r=-0.15^*$	$r=0.61^{**}$
Tendency to Recovery and Be Active After Failure	$r=0.47^{**}$	$r=-0.16^*$
Tendency to Prefer Difficult Tasks	$r=0.26^{**}$	$r=0.06$
Tendency of not doing homework	$r=-0.09$	$r=0.17^*$
Academic Risk Taking Level	$r=0.36^{**}$	$r=-0.38^{**}$

\*\* $p<0.01$ , \* $p<0.05$

According to the findings presented in Table 1, a negative and statistically significant correlation was determined between the tendency of developing negativity following a failure and positive perfectionism [ $r=-0.15, p<0.05$ ]. As for the correlation between the tendency of developing negativity following a failure and negative perfectionism, it was determined to be positive and statistically significant [ $r=0.65, p<0.01$ ]. According to this, the more the positive perfectionism traits of the students increase, the less their tendency to develop negativity after a failure will be. On the other hand, as the negative perfectionism traits increase it is observed that negative tendencies after a failure also increase.

A positive and statistically significant correlation between the tendency to recover and be active after a failure and positive perfectionism was determined [ $r=0.47, p<0.01$ ]. As for the correlation between the tendency to recover and be active after a failure and negative perfectionism, it was determined to be negative and again statistically significant [ $r=-0.16, p<0.05$ ]. Considering this finding, it can be asserted that as the positive perfectionism traits of the students increase their tendencies to recover and be active

after a failure also increase and as their negative perfectionism traits increase they tend less to recover and be active in consequence of a failure.

A positive and statistically significant correlation between positive perfectionism and the tendency to engage in difficult tasks was determined [ $r=0.26$ ,  $p<0.01$ ]. The correlation between the tendency to engage in difficult tasks and negative perfectionism was not found to be statistically significant [ $r=0.06$ ,  $p>0.05$ ]. On the basis of this finding, it can be asserted that as the students' positive perfectionism traits increase, also their tendency to engage in difficult tasks increase. On the other hand, negative perfectionism is determined to have no effect on the students' tendency of engaging in difficult tasks.

Again according to Table 1, it was determined that there is a negative correlation between the students' tendency of not doing their homework and their positive perfectionism traits, yet this correlation was not found out to be statistically significant [ $r=-0.09$ ,  $p>0.05$ ]. Considering this finding, it is possible to state that positive perfectionism of students does not have any effect on their tendency of not doing their homework. As for the correlation between the students' tendency of not doing their homework and their negative perfectionism traits, it was determined to be a positive and statistically significant correlation [ $r=0.17$ ,  $p<0.01$ ]. According to this, as the negative perfectionism traits of students increase their tendency of not doing their homework also increase.

Examining the scores pertaining to the whole of the scale, it was determined that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between academic risk taking and positive perfectionism [ $r=0.36$ ,  $p<0.05$ ] and a negative and statistically significant correlation between academic risk taking and negative perfectionism [ $r=-0.38$ ,  $p<0.05$ ]. According to this finding, as the positive perfectionism traits of students increase, the levels at which they take academic risks also increase and while the negative perfectionism traits increase their academic risk taking levels decrease.

## DISCUSSION

In this study it was aimed to examine the relation between 8th grade students' academic risk taking levels and their positive and negative perfectionism traits.

The presence of a negative and statistically significant correlation was determined between the tendency of being negative after a failure and positive perfectionism. Considering that positive perfectionists are capable of confronting the personal and environmental restrictions with maturity (Hamacheck, 1978), their low tendency of developing negativity after a failure is an expected result. This finding is supported with the consideration that, when they fail to achieve the targets they set, positive perfectionists do not lose their eagerness to work for achieving these, and on the contrary, they get motivated to work harder by learning from their mistakes (Altun & Yazici, 2010; Kottman & Ashby, 2000; Rice, Ashby & Slaney, 1998; Sarioglu, 2011).

A positive and statistically significant correlation was determined between the tendency of developing negativity after a failure and negative perfectionism. Negative perfectionists adopt an attitude of being excessively self-critical and in the face of the failures they experience while trying to achieve the high standards they set they blame themselves (Burns & Fedewa, 2005; Rice & Ashby, 2007). Furthermore, negative perfectionist students feel "devastated" when they fail in achieving their targets (Kottman & Ashby, 2000; Rice & Ashby, 2007). In this context, negative perfectionist students' tendency of being negative following a failure can be evaluated as an expected result.

A positive and statistically significant correlation between the tendency to recover and be active after a failure and positive perfectionism was determined. The consideration that positive perfectionists also take failure as an acceptable result (Hamacheck, 1978) supports this finding. As for the correlation between

the tendency to recover and be active after a failure and negative perfectionism, it was determined to be negative and statistically significant. This may result from the development of course-related anxiety (Eum & Rice, 2011; Frost & Di Bartolo, 2002; Hanimoglu & Inanc, 2011) sense of incompetency and avoidance behavior (Hamachek, 1978; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade & Dewey, 1995) by negative perfectionist students following a failure. The strict self-evaluation system of negative perfectionist students may decrease their tendency to recover and be active after a failure, by reducing their motivation and disrupting their productivity (Sarioglu, 2011).

A positive and statistically significant correlation between the tendency of engaging in difficult tasks and positive perfectionism was determined in the study. The presence of performance-triggering traits of the positive dimension of perfectionism, as determining high personal standards, putting in a intensive effort, having low levels of anxiety and high levels of motivation (Hamacheck, 1978) and academic self-confidence (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000) may be the source of this finding. The correlation between the tendency to engage in difficult tasks and negative perfectionism was not found to be statistically significant. This may be due to the presence of unrealistically high standards, fear of failure (Slade & Owens, 1998), anxiety Blankstein, Flett, Hewitt & Eng, 1993; Frost & Di Bartolo, 2002; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), sense of incompetence (Fedewa, Burns & Gomez, 2005) and avoidance behavior (Bieling, Israeli & Antony, 2004; Hamachek, 1978; Slade & Owens, 1998) of the negative perfectionist students.

It was also determined in the study that, there is no statistically significant correlation between the tendency of not doing homework and positive perfectionism. On the other hand, a positive and statistically significant correlation was determined between the tendency of not doing homework and negative perfectionism. It is believed that the postponement (Ferrari, 1992; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000; Slaney & Ashby, 1996) and avoidance (Bieling, Israeli & Antony, 2004; Hamachek, 1978; Slade & Owens, 1998; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade & Dewey, 1995) behaviors caused by negative perfectionism may be among the causes of this finding.

Examining the scores pertaining to the whole of the Academic Risk Taking Scale, it was determined that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between academic risk taking and positive perfectionism, and a negative and statistically significant correlation between academic risk taking and negative perfectionism. This finding is supported by several other authors (Ashby & Rice, 2002; Blankstein, Flett, Hewitt & Eng, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, & Turnbull, 1992; Parker, 2000; Quadland, 1980; Ram, 2005; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007), who found that one's perfectionist beliefs might lead to positive or negative consequences, and in parallel with theoretical knowledge (Hamachek, 1978; Rice & Ashby, 2007; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007).

There is a positive correlation between positive perfectionism and academic risk taking whereas a negative correlation exists between negative perfectionism and academic risk taking. The finding suggests that students will exhibit more academic risk taking behaviors when their positive perfectionism is supported. Considering that perfectionism can be traced back to childhood experiences (Blatt, 1995; Hamachek, 1978; Rice, Lopez & Vergara, 2005; Sorotzkin, 1998) and, in particular, the parent-child relationship (Blatt, 1995; Enns, Cox & Clara, 2002; Hamachek, 1978; Rice, Ashby & Preusser, 1996; Sorotzkin, 1998; Tire, 2011), it is parents who are mainly responsible for supporting their children's positive perfectionism and minimizing their negative perfectionism. Children are likely to develop negative perfectionism when their parents set them unrealistic goals and approve them only if these goals are achieved (Hamachek, 1978) and when they adopt an interventionist, punishing and overly-controlling attitude towards their children (McCranie & Bass, 1984). Thus, it is essential that parents should specify flexible standards for their children (Hamachek, 1978) and have a positive, encouraging and supportive approach towards them (Sorotzkin, 1998; Witcher, Alexander, Onwuegbuzie, Collins & Witcher, 2007) so that their children are prevented from developing negative perfectionism and encouraged to have more characteristics related to positive perfectionist. The fact that academic risk taking is positively correlated

with positive perfectionism but negatively correlated with negative perfectionism suggests that children will be provided with an opportunity to exhibit more academic risk taking behaviors when their positive perfectionism is supported.

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