



The Relationship Between Academic Perfectionism And Self-Efficacy: An Investigation on Students of The Faculty of Sport Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy of students in the faculty of sport sciences. Data were collected through two validated instruments: the Academic Perfectionism Scale developed by Odacı et al. (2017), and the General Self-Efficacy Scale originally developed by Sherer et al. and later adapted into Turkish by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010). The Academic Perfectionism Scale consists of three sub-dimensions, namely self-doubt, comparison, and idealization, while the General Self-Efficacy Scale includes initiation, perseverance, and maintenance efforts as its sub-dimensions. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy levels. Specifically, higher levels of self-doubt and comparison were associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, whereas students with strong self-efficacy beliefs were found to be more resilient, persistent, and motivated when facing challenges. These results are in line with previous studies suggesting that adaptive perfectionism may strengthen self-confidence and motivation, while maladaptive perfectionism leads to procrastination, self-sabotage, and increased anxiety. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy among university students, particularly those in sport sciences. Recognizing this relationship may contribute to the development of educational strategies that not only enhance academic achievement but also support students' psychological well-being. Encouraging students to set realistic goals, view mistakes as a natural part of learning, and direct self-criticism in a constructive manner can help foster a healthier balance between academic performance and personal growth.

Keywords: Academic perfectionism, self-efficacy, scale, student achievement, psychological well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Universities are higher education institutions that both support individuals' development in terms of knowledge, skills, and values, and aim to contribute qualified and well-equipped individuals to society. Therefore, universities are among the most important institutions shaping the future of societies and countries. Students in these institutions are expected not only to acquire academic knowledge but also to integrate this knowledge into their lives in meaningful ways. Despite different socio-cultural characteristics, one of the

most common aims among university students is the desire to achieve academic success, as academic success is regarded as the primary condition for graduation. In this context, university life brings with it a competitive atmosphere. Hence, students often tend to avoid making mistakes and set difficult-to-reach goals (Burns, 1980; Flett & Hewitt, 2002).

Perfectionism is defined as setting high and often unrealistic standards for oneself and evaluating one's

success based on these standards (Flett et al., 1989). Burns (1980) stated that perfectionistic individuals measure their personal worth by the products or performances they present and believe that their next achievement must be perfect. In the academic context, perfectionism is evaluated as the student's setting rigid goals for oneself in line with expectations of academic success that are difficult or even impossible to attain (Odacı et al., 2017).

Academic perfectionism leads individuals to set extremely high standards both for themselves and for others. This may result in negative outcomes such as procrastination, fear of failure, and excessive self-criticism, and may even lead to school dropout (Flett, Hewitt, & Heisel, 2014; Hamachek, 1978; Kearns et al., 2008; Shafran & Mansell, 2001; Victor-Aigbodion & Ngwoke, 2020).

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, was defined by Bandura (1997) as an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully perform a specific action. This belief affects performance and motivation not only in academic environments but also in sports or daily activities. For instance, in an academic task such as preparing a scientific report or in a physical action such as striking a ball, the individual's prior sense of efficacy can directly influence the performance outcome (Jinks & Lorschach, 2003). Thus, self-efficacy is considered a fundamental construct that provides the cognitive, emotional, and motivational components necessary for the individual to perform a behavior (Luszczynska et al., 2005). In short, while academic perfectionism refers to an individual's tendency to set unrealistic academic standards and to avoid mistakes (Burns, 1980; Flett et al., 1989; Odacı et al., 2017), self-efficacy refers to one's belief in the capacity to successfully complete any given task (Bandura, 1997).

A large portion of human behavior is shaped by future-oriented expectations and anticipations. Therefore, individuals' beliefs about whether they can successfully complete a given task—that is, their general self-efficacy—play a critical role in shaping academic and social life. The belief that one can change behavior and make progress is important for overcoming problems encountered (Burger, 2006). Consequently, children and adolescents with high general self-efficacy may be expected to become adults with high self-confidence in the future.

Academic life is not limited to processes of knowledge acquisition; it is also a multidimensional process that includes personal development, motivation, and psychological well-being. For this reason, studies in the literature have examined the relationship between academic perfectionism and various other variables and have yielded noteworthy findings. For example, Çetiner and Çelikkaleli (2023) found a positive and significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and student burnout among university students, as well as a negative and significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and both self-regulation skills and self-compassion.

Among the important personality characteristics that determine students' academic achievement are academic perfectionism and self-efficacy beliefs. Research examining the relationship between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy indicates a multidimensional interaction between these two constructs and points to differing results. For example, while adaptive perfectionism may enhance students' self-confidence, maladaptive perfectionism may weaken self-efficacy. Therefore, an in-depth examination of the relationship between the two constructs is of great importance for students' academic achievement and psychological well-being. In a study by Locicero and Ashby (2000), academic perfectionistic tendencies were associated with individuals' self-efficacy levels; in particular, individuals who exhibited a balanced and healthy form of perfectionism were found to have higher self-efficacy perceptions compared to other groups. This suggests that perfectionism is not a purely negative trait; when at appropriate levels, it may strengthen students' academic confidence and motivation. Stoeber et al. (2008) distinguished between the "strivings" and "self-criticism" dimensions of perfectionism and examined their effects on self-efficacy. Their results indicated that perfectionistic strivings can positively affect self-efficacy, whereas an approach characterized by intense self-criticism can weaken it (Stoeber et al., 2008).

Recent studies have likewise reported mixed results. For instance, Anjum (2025) showed that self-efficacy is positively related to adaptive perfectionism and negatively related to maladaptive perfectionism. This underscores that perfectionism is not invariably detrimental; its form and orientation matter. Ardestani et al. (2025) investigated the interaction between self-regulation and self-efficacy in learning processes and revealed that students with high self-efficacy displayed both perfectionistic tendencies and strong self-regulatory skills. In this context, positive relationships between perfectionism and self-efficacy can also be observed.

Sotardi et al. (2025) examined the relationship between different perfectionism profiles and perceived academic achievement, self-compassion, and well-being, and found evidence that some types of perfectionism may support self-efficacy. Ditchburn et al. (2025) compared socially prescribed perfectionism (e.g., "others' expectations") with self-efficacy and found that under certain conditions, self-efficacy showed inverse correlations with socially driven perfectionism.

In a study conducted in Türkiye, the relationship between students' academic perfectionism levels and their self-efficacy perceptions was examined; some subcomponents of academic perfectionism—especially self-confidence and the tendency to make social comparisons—were found to have potentially negative effects on self-efficacy beliefs (Odacı et al., 2017).

Similar results are observed in studies focusing on the field of sport sciences. Findings by Erturan et al. (2020)

showed that self-efficacy beliefs exert an indirect yet strong effect on students' academic and athletic achievements and that self-efficacy acts as a mediating variable shaping the effects of perfectionistic tendencies (Erturan et al., 2020). This implies that a strong sense of self-efficacy may mitigate the negative reflections of perfectionism. In other words, while excessive perfectionistic attitudes may increase anxiety and burnout in students' academic lives, individuals with strong self-efficacy beliefs can be more persistent, determined, and motivated in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1997; Erturan et al., 2020). In a comprehensive meta-analysis conducted by Curran and Hill (2019), a marked increase in perfectionism levels over time was observed; this increase was associated with decreased self-efficacy, heightened anxiety, and increased indicators of burnout among students. This finding draws attention to the mounting pressures of modern academic environments on students.

Examining the relationship between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy beliefs is important for a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic performance and learning processes. Students with high self-efficacy may be more resilient, motivated, and persistent when faced with difficulties; in contrast, students with high levels of academic perfectionism may resort to negative behaviors such as excessive anxiety, procrastination, and self-sabotage (Kearns et al., 2008; Shafran & Mansell, 2001). Therefore, a detailed examination of the multidimensional relationship between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy is considered a critical necessity for both supporting students' academic performance and protecting their psychological health. However, despite national and international research, there are still aspects that remain unclear in the literature. In Türkiye, the number of studies examining academic perfectionism and self-efficacy beliefs among students of faculties of sport sciences is quite limited. For example, Küçüker and Işık (2022) investigated the predictive power of academic motivation, academic self-efficacy, and perfectionism on academic achievement in students of faculties of sport sciences. While they found significant relationships among other variables, they did not detect a significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic perfectionism. Moreover, no study was found that examined academic perfectionism together with general self-efficacy.

In fact, for students of faculties of sport sciences, the relationship between academic perfectionism and both academic and general self-efficacy—examined in this study—has special importance in the context of both educational and performance-based goals. These students aim not only to achieve academic success but also to perform at a high level in athletic contexts. While the development of an athletic identity may strengthen individuals' sense of self-confidence, excessive academic perfectionism may negatively contribute to this process. Therefore, investigating the interaction between these two constructs may help develop strategies that enable students of sport sciences to establish a healthier balance between their

academic and athletic responsibilities (Erturan et al., 2020). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between academic perfectionism levels and general self-efficacy beliefs among students of a Faculty of Sport Sciences.

METHOD

This study was conducted using a correlational survey model. Correlational designs are research frameworks that allow the examination of relationships between two or more variables. The aim of this model is to describe the current situation and to reveal the level and direction of the relationship between variables. According to Karasar (2014), survey models aim to reveal “what is” accurately and objectively regarding the phenomena or situations that constitute the fundamental feature of the research. In this study, the relationship between academic perfectionism levels and self-efficacy beliefs of students in a Faculty of Sport Sciences was examined. In this context, within quantitative research methods, a descriptive correlational survey design was adopted.

A convenience (available) sampling method was preferred in the selection of the sample. This non-probability sampling approach allows data collection from individuals who are most easily accessible to the researcher and who volunteer to participate. The main reason for preferring this method is to conduct the research more efficiently in terms of time, cost, and labor (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). In addition, the study group is expected to be suitable for the research conditions and accessible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this regard, the researcher identified participants among easily accessible students based on voluntariness until the required sample size was reached. The sample consisted of 266 students (136 women, 130 men) studying at a Faculty of Sport Sciences at a university in western Türkiye. By department, 95 students (37.7%) were from Physical Education and Sports Teaching, 71 students (26.7%) from Coaching Education, 50 students (18.8%) from Recreation, and 50 students (18.8%) from Sports Management.

Data Collection Tools

The necessary data were collected using the “Academic Perfectionism Scale” developed by Odacı et al. (2017) and the “General Self-Efficacy Scale,” originally developed by Sherer et al. (1982) and adapted into Turkish by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010). Permissions were obtained from institutions, participants, and the owners of the scales.

Academic Perfectionism Scale: The Academic Perfectionism Scale consists of 13 items. There are no reverse-scored items. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the validity of the scale; confirmatory factor analysis was then used to test the validity of the identified structure. Internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients were examined to assess reliability. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .82. The scale has three factors: Self-Doubt (Items 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12; e.g., “Even if

I have answered exam questions very carefully, I often feel I have not answered them correctly enough.”), Comparison (Items 2, 5, 7, 10; e.g., “If someone is more successful than me at school, I feel like a failure in everything.”), and Idealization (Items 1, 6, 13; e.g., “I want to be the most successful student in the class.”). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale: “Strongly disagree (1)” to “Strongly agree (5).” Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of academic perfectionism.

General Self-Efficacy Scale: The General Self-Efficacy Scale includes 17 items. Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 17 are reverse-scored. The test yielded a Cronbach’s alpha value of .80. In the present study, the scale demonstrated good reliability, with an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89 and subscale alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.89. The scale has three subdimensions: Initiation (Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 17; e.g., “One of my problems is that I cannot start tasks on time.”), Perseverance (Items 3, 13, 14, 15, 16; e.g., “If I cannot do a task on my first attempt, I keep trying until I succeed.”), and Sustaining Effort/Insistence (Items 1, 8, 9; e.g., “When I make plans, I am sure I can carry them out.”). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale in response to “How well does this statement describe you?” from “not at all” to “very well.” Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of general self-efficacy.

Ethical Approval

This research received ethical approval from the Pamukkale University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics

Committee (decision no. E-60116787-020-44905, dated 16.04.2021) and was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Analysis

Data were collected by the researchers from students enrolled in a state university located in western Türkiye, during class time. Necessary permissions were obtained from institutions and from volunteer students. Explanations about the scales were provided; students were told they could ask questions if anything was unclear. Students reported that they understood the items.

Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. Before analysis, normality was examined. Skewness and kurtosis values between +1.5 and -1.5 were interpreted as supporting the assumption of normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis results conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the academic perfectionism levels and self-efficacy beliefs of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, skewness coefficients ranged between .339 and -.270 and kurtosis coefficients between -.351 and -.816. Second, Pearson correlation analysis was used in accordance with the research problem

Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis Coefficients of the Study Variables

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Academic Perfectionism	0.339	-0.351
General Self-Efficacy	-0.270	-0.816

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis results conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the academic perfectionism levels and self-efficacy beliefs of students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences are presented in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, students’ mean scores for Self-Doubt (M = 2.60, SD = 0.98) and Comparison (M = 2.18, SD = 0.93), as well as the overall academic perfectionism mean (M = 2.85, SD = 0.78), were around the midpoint of the scale (between “disagree” and “neutral”), whereas the mean for Idealization was above the midpoint (M = 3.77, SD = 0.87). In addition, the means for Initiation (M = 3.96, SD = 0.79), Perseverance (M = 4.07, SD = 0.66), Sustaining (M = 3.82, SD = 0.73), and overall self-efficacy (M = 3.95, SD = 0.59) indicate values higher than the

scale midpoints (i.e., relatively “good”). Correlation analysis showed that there were significant negative relationships between the mean score of the Academic Perfectionism Scale (APS) and the mean score of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSS) ($r = -.310, p < .01$), between the APS mean and the mean of Initiation ($r = -.436, p < .01$), and between the APS mean and the mean of Persistence ($r = -.330, p < .01$). No significant correlation was found between the APS mean and the mean of Maintenance ($r = .038, p > .05$). Furthermore, only the GSS mean showed significant negative correlations with the mean scores of the Self-Doubt ($r = -.415, p < .01$) and Comparison ($r = -.383, p < .01$) subdimensions of academic perfectionism.

Table 2. Correlations Between Overall and Subscale Means of Academic Perfectionism and Self-Efficacy Scales

Variables	Descriptive Statistics		Bivariate Correlations							
	X̄	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-Doubt	2.60	0.98	1	.734**	.438**	-.499**	-.413**	-.079	.871**	-.415**
2. Comparison	2.18	0.93		1	.516**	-.484**	-.404**	-.027	.895**	-.383**



Variables	Descriptive Statistics	Bivariate Correlations						
3. Idealization	3.77	0.87	1	-,098	,005	,204**	,759**	,040
4. Initiation	3.96	0.79		1	,699**	,269**	-,436**	,829**
5. Perseverance	4.07	0.66			1	,450**	-,330**	,881**
6. Sustaining	3.82	0.73				1	,038	,705**
7. APO	2.85	0.78					1	-,310**
8. GSEO	3.95	0.59						1

p < .05, ** p < .01; APO = Academic Perfectionism Overall; GSEO = General Self-Efficacy Overa

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined academic perfectionism levels and self-efficacy beliefs among students in a Faculty of Sport Sciences and investigated the relationship between these two variables. The findings in Table 2 show that students' mean scores on the Self-Doubt and Comparison subscales of the Academic Perfectionism Scale are close to the scale midpoint. This suggests that students experience a certain degree of doubt about their competencies and occasionally tend to compare themselves with others. However, the mean score for the Idealization subscale is above the scale midpoint, indicating that students tend to set high and idealized academic goals. Thus, students exhibit perfectionistic tendencies primarily in the form of setting difficult-to-reach standards, while these tendencies are not as pronounced in self-doubt and comparison.

Considering the findings from the Self-Efficacy Scale, students' mean scores for Initiation, Perseverance, and Sustaining were above the scale midpoint. The particularly high mean on Perseverance indicates that students tend to demonstrate resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties. The overall self-efficacy score being above the midpoint suggests that students are confident in their ability to handle academic and personal tasks and are motivated to overcome obstacles they encounter.

Taken together, these results suggest that students' high self-efficacy perceptions may play a balancing role against the negative effects of

academic perfectionism. Indeed, the literature emphasizes that self-efficacy can reduce the potential negative outcomes of perfectionistic tendencies (e.g., procrastination, self-sabotage, or excessive self-criticism; Bandura, 1997; Erturan et al., 2020). However, high scores on the Idealization dimension may also indicate a risk of setting unrealistic academic goals. Although students' strong self-efficacy may make them more resilient in the face of such high goals, it should be kept in mind that repeated experiences of failure could lead to loss of motivation and increased self-criticism.

In conclusion, students in the Faculty of Sport Sciences generally exhibit high levels of self-efficacy and perfectionistic tendencies concentrated more in Idealization. This indicates that students aspire to high standards in both academic and athletic contexts and, due to their strong sense

of self-efficacy, can remain resilient and motivated in pursuing these goals. Another important result is the significant negative relationship between students' academic perfectionism levels and their self-efficacy beliefs. Considering both overall means and subdimensions, as students' academic perfectionism increases, their self-efficacy tends to decrease. This points to an inverse relationship between the likelihood of success and the rigidity of achievement standards. In other words, when individuals set difficult and unrealistic goals, the perceived infeasibility of these goals may weaken self-efficacy (Burns, 1980). It is noteworthy that the participating students also possess athletic identities. Athletic experience enables individuals to recognize both their strengths and weaknesses; this awareness contributes to the development of self-efficacy beliefs. As Bandura (1982) noted, even when confronted with a task beyond one's capacity, continued effort can increase the likelihood of success. In this regard, athletes learn to try again, to be patient, and to show resilience against difficulties, and they carry these characteristics into their academic lives. The literature emphasizes that individuals with high self-efficacy are more determined, persistent, and disciplined in the pursuit of long-term goals (Erturan et al., 2020). Recent research suggests that the nature of this relationship may be more complex. Anjum (2025) found a positive relationship between adaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy and a negative relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy. Similarly, Ardestani et al. (2025) found that the strong link between self-regulation and self-efficacy shapes perfectionistic tendencies. This suggests that perfectionism may yield more positive outcomes among individuals with strong self-regulatory skills. In addition, Sotardi et al. (2025) examined the relationships of different perfectionism profiles with self-compassion and academic achievement and found that some types of perfectionism may support self-efficacy. Conversely, Ditchburn et al. (2025) showed that socially prescribed perfectionism is negatively associated with self-efficacy. Overall, these results indicate that perfectionism is not a unidimensional phenomenon and that its different subtypes may have varying effects on self-efficacy. Taken together, the findings suggest that the maladaptive dimension of perfectionism weakens students' self-efficacy beliefs, whereas its adaptive dimension may contribute to motivation and achievement (Locicero & Ashby, 2000; Stoeber et al., 2008).

In sum, understanding the relationship between academic perfectionism and self-efficacy is of great importance not only for students' success in courses but also for creating strategies that will enable balanced development in psychological and social terms. Today, university students face intense competition and high expectations for achievement, which often fuels perfectionistic tendencies. However, excessive perfectionism may weaken individuals' confidence and increase fear of failure. Therefore, accurately evaluating this relationship will contribute to helping students not only reach their academic goals but also strengthen their psychological resilience. Such an approach necessitates that educational institutions encourage students to set more realistic goals, guide self-criticism in constructive ways, and emphasize practices that support self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, a healthier balance can be established between students' academic success and personal development.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of this study, several practical and research-oriented recommendations are offered:

(1) Students should be taught that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process; self-criticism should be kept at a constructive level. Therefore, helping students avoid excessive self-criticism and unrealistic expectations should be a fundamental aim of educational environments.

2) Self-efficacy perceptions can be strengthened by assigning practice-based activities that increase students' success experiences and by giving sport-based tasks.

(3) Through counseling and psychological guidance units, special work should be conducted with students who display maladaptive perfectionism; skills in setting realistic goals, self-compassion, and stress management should be supported.

(4) Future studies should examine the relationships between types of perfectionism (adaptive, maladaptive, socially prescribed) and self-efficacy using longitudinal designs and diverse samples.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size and its focus on university students from specific regions of Türkiye, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretations of the relationships among variables. Although validated measurement instruments were used, they may not fully capture individual and contextual differences. Future research using larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and alternative data collection methods is recommended.

Author Contributions

B.A: Review, editing, data analysis, original draft preparation. M.B: Data collection All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki after obtaining approval from Pamukkale University Non-Intrusive Clinical Research Ethics Board on 16.04.2021 (Decision number: 449054).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement

Datasets are available through the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors unequivocally assert that this research was undertaken while devoid of any commercial or financial affiliations that might be perceived as potential conflicts of interest.

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