Learner Perfectionism and its Role in Foreign Language Learning Success, Academic Achievement, and Learner Anxiety

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Abstract—The major aim of this study was to examine the role of learner perfectionism in foreign language learning success, academic achievement, and learner anxiety. A sample of 300 junior and senior students of English in Mashhad universities completed Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale (2000) and Speilberger's State/Trait Anxiety Inventory (1983). Students' grades of four skills (reading, speaking, listening, writing) and GPA were also obtained through the questionnaires. The results of the correlational analysis indicated a negative significant relationship between skills of reading, speaking, listening, GPA, and perfectionism and also a positive significant relationship between learner perfectionism and learner anxiety. The results did not confirm the researchers` hypothesis with regard to the relationships between age, gender, and learner perfectionism. Further analysis of data was also conducted. Students were divided into successful and unsuccessful groups with regard to their scores in the skills and GPA, and then perfectionism level of successful and unsuccessful groups were compared. The results of t-tests confirmed the results of the correlational analysis except for GPA. Altogether, the findings of this study showed how perfectionistic tendencies in language learners are associated with low academic achievement and poor performance in language skills.

Index Terms—academic achievement, foreign language learning success, learner anxiety, learner perfectionism

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of the "perfect human" has always been appealing for human beings. In fact, human beings have always liked perfection and admired people in pursuit of perfection. This tendency and its effects on human behavior have attracted the attention of psychologists and theoreticians for long; it has been named as perfectionism and categorized as a psychological construct just in recent decades (Mehrabizadeh, 2003).

In short, perfectionism, in psychology, is a belief that perfection should be strived for; perfectionists are people, who strive to meet very high standards in everything they do, and pursue unrealistically high goals across any domains, be it in the workplace, in sport, cooking, etc (Hewitt & Flett, 1991 a, b). They believe that mistakes must never be made, and see mistakes as evidence of unworthiness. They are preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval, and if they experience failure and disappointment, become dysfunctionally depressed (Hollender, 1965).

In the past decade, there has been an increasing interest in the perfectionism construct, and it has been associated with many forms of psychopathology including trait anxiety (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a,b), depression, social anxiety (Rosser, Issakidis, & Peters, 2003). Besides the clinical studies, a large body of research on perfectionism has used university students as their subjects. The results of these studies have found perfectionism to be associated with academic procrastination, anxiety, worry (Stober & Joorman, 2001; Chang, Zumberg, Sanna, Girz, Kade, Shair, Hermann, & Srivastaka, 2007), lower academic success (Brown, Heimberg, Frost, Makris, Juster & Leung, 1999).

Different symptoms of perfectionism can be also observed in students. Based on Pacht's (1984) conceptualization, a number of symptoms of perfectionism in students that seem to be counterproductive to learning of any kind include:

[1] performance standards that are impossibly high and unnecessarily rigid;

[2] motivation more from fear of failure than from pursuit of success;

[3] measurement of one's own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment;

[4] all-or-nothing evaluations that label anything other than perfection as failure;

[5] difficulty in taking credit or pleasure, even when success is achieved, because such achievement is merely what is expected;

[6] procrastination in getting started on work that will be judged, and

[7] long delays in completing assignments, or repeatedly starting over on assignments, because the work must be perfect from the beginning and continue to be perfect as one goes along (p.1, cited in Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Most of the studies on perfectionism have focused on the relationship between perfectionism and different psychopathologies, that is, the construct of perfectionism has been addressed from a psychological perspective. Few studies have addressed the association between perfectionism and language learning. One of the studies which aimed at such a relationship was that of Gregersen and Horwitz (2002). In their study, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) examined the relationship between perfectionism and language learning with a focus on language anxiety. According to them, the reactions of the students to their oral performance indicated that anxious and non-anxious foreign language learners do differ in terms of their self-reports of perfectionist tendencies. Specifically, anxious learners reported higher standards for their English performance, a greater tendency toward procrastination, greater worry over the opinions of others, and a higher level of concern over their errors than non-anxious learners.

In the educational context of our country, the ideas of "the best" and "the perfect" exist and are valued in its different levels. Foreign language proficiency, for example, is usually defined in terms of a native speaker competence. For example, many English learners believe in the superiority of the British or the American accents and spend their time and energy in strict imitation of either varieties.

However, this view toward language learning, that is, the appeal to native speaker as a model has been abandoned by many authorities in the field (Seildhofer, 2000; Widdowson, 2003). Widdowson's (2003) notion of the "death of native speaker" best illustrates this abandonment of the traditional model. As it is evident, a gap exists between what theory says and what is practiced in our country. In spite of what theory recommends, it is generally assumed that our language learners' competence should correspond as closely as possible to that of native speakers.

Though studies in other countries have uncovered the debilitating effects of perfectionism (Mehrabizadeh, 2003), this construct, to the knowledge of the researchers, has not been addressed in our country in the field of language learning and teaching, so it seems that there is a need to investigate the possible associations between this psychological construct and language learning. Therefore, this study is seeking to answer the following questions:

Q1: Does learner perfectionism play any role in reading?
Q2: Does learner perfectionism play any role in speaking?
Q3: Does learner perfectionism play any role in listening?
Q4: Does learner perfectionism play any role in writing?
Q5: Does learner perfectionism play any role in academic achievement (GPA)?
Q6: Does learner perfectionism play any role in learner anxiety?
Q7: Does sex play any role in learner perfectionism?
Q8: Does age play any role in learner perfectionism?

II. METHOD

A. Participants

The original sample, in this study, comprised 360 participants; however, due to not providing the required information in the questionnaire, 60 questionnaires were dropped. Therefore, the study was conducted with 300 students from B.A. English majors in three universities of Mashhad. 96 participants were students of English Language and Literature at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; 40 were students of TEFL in Azad University of Mashhad, and 164 were students of English Translation and English Language and Literature at Khayyam University of Mashhad.

The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 25. Since gender was one of the variables in this study, the subjects chosen were both male and female. 47 of the participants were male, and 253 participants were female; the majority of the participants were female (84.33%).

Of the 300 participants 200 (66.6%) were juniors, and 100 (33.3%) were seniors. Juniors and seniors were chosen, because it was important for the researchers that they pass the courses of reading, speaking, listening, and writing.

The participants were not randomly chosen from a larger population, the criteria for choosing them, were their major, and their grades (being juniors or seniors). In fact, selection was based on accessibility.

B. Instrumentation

Participants were required to complete the following instruments: Ahwaz Perfectionism scale (2000), and the Spielberger STAI (1983), which are dealt with in some detail in the following sections.

1. Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale

Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale (APS) is a self-reporting 27-item scale that was developed by Najarian, Attari, and Zargar in Ahwaz University in 2000. It was designed using a sample of 395 students of Ahwaz University by doing a factorial analysis. The items were developed using valid psychological texts such as MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), Spielberger Anxiety, etc. (Mehrabizadeh, 2003).

As for the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha for the whole sample (male and female) is 0.90, for female students is 0.90, and for male students is 0.89 (Mehrabizadeh, 2003).

According to Mehrabizadeh (2003), to measure the validity of APS, it was distributed among students along with type A behavior pattern scale, SCL-90 (Sympton checklist 90-Revised) and Cooper-Smith self-esteem scale (1967). The validity coefficient between APS and type A behavior pattern scale is 0.65, between APS and SCL90-R is 0.41 and between APS and Cooper-smith self- esteem scale is 0.39. Other studies have assessed the concurrent validity of APS.

The results of these studies show that APS has an acceptable level of reliability and validity (Mehrabizadeh, 2003). APS is also the only scale which has been developed in Iran and corresponds to Iranian culture and society.

In the present study, an internal reliability check was computed on APS, Cronbach's coefficient alpha for APS computed on 300 participants was 0.88. This result indicates that APS is satisfactorily reliable in terms of its internal consistency.

2. Spielberger STAI

To determine whether there is any relationship between anxiety and learner perfectionism, the researchers employed the Spielberger STAI (1983). The questionnaire is a self-report scale, including 40 items, which measures two constructs of state and trait anxiety, 20 items being devoted to each. The items are of a 4- point Likert type scale continuum from "very seldom" to "very often".

In view of the cultural differences and to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the content of the questionnaire for low-level students, the translated version of the questionnaire was employed (Sheikh rohani, 1999).

The developers of STAI computed a reliability check using both test-retest and internal consistency methods; the average of alpha cronbach was 0.92 for the state anxiety scale and 0.90 for the trait one. The test-test reliability coefficient was 0.33 for the state scale and 0.76 for the trait one (Sheikh rohani, 1999).

The developers of STAI did long and extensive studies to validate the items in STAI. Based on these studies the content of the items has had different changes and as a result, the validity of STAI has raised much; these studies to validate include factor analysis, convergent/divergent, concurrent and construct methods. (Sheikh rohani, 1999).

The reliability of the translated version of STAI was assessed internal reliability check using a sample of 600 subjects; and was found to be 0.91 for the state scale and 0.90 for the trait one, and 0.94 for the whole scale. The results of validation through concurrent method showed significant differences at 0.01 and 0.05 levels between the criterion and normal groups (cited in Sheikh rohani, 1999).

In the present study, an internal reliability check was also computed on Spielberger STAI (1983). Cronbach's alpha for the state anxiety scale was 0.92, and for the trait anxiety scale was 0.93. These results indicate that Spielberger STAI is satisfactorily reliable in terms of its internal consistency.

C.   Procedure

1. Data collection

In October (2007), in the second month of the academic year, the participants completed both of the scales, that is, the APS and Spielberger STAI at the same time. The process of data collection took about one month.

Responding to the questionnaires was voluntary, that is, the researchers asked the students whether they would participate in the research or not. Moreover, this process was done with the permission of their teachers at the beginning of the classes.

Each participant needed almost 20 minutes to complete the scales. Before distributing the questionnaires, the researchers gave required instructions on filling out the questionnaires. Prior to responding to the questionnaires the, participants provided the following information at the top of the questionnaires: demographic variables (age, gender), student number, grade point average (GPA), and the course grades of reading1, 2, 3 for the skill of reading; speaking1, 2, oral production of stories1, 2 for the skill of speaking; grammar1, 2, developed writing, letter writing, and essay writing for the skill of writing, and listening1, 2 for the skill of listening.

Since it was not possible to obtain all of the students' scores from the registrar's offices of all universities, completed questionnaires were chosen randomly by the researchers and these students' scores and GPA were obtained from the registrar's offices in order to investigate the possibility of any lack of correspondence between the course grades reported by the participants themselves and the grades obtained from the registrar's offices. The correspondence between the two was 80%.

2. Data analysis

Based on the guidelines provided by the developers of APS the perfectionism scales were scored. The questions in APS are of a Likert-type scale with four possible answers to each of the questions. The scale ranges from 1(Never) to 4 (Very often). All of the positively worded statements, such as "I forget my defeats easily" and "other people live up with my expectations" were reversely scored. These items are numbers 11, 16, 22, 27 in the scale.

The Spielberger STAI (1983) was also scored based on the guidelines laid down by the developer of the questionnaire. The state and trait anxiety scales are Likert-type scales with four possible responses to each of the statements. The scale ranges from 1 (very little) to 4 (very much) in the state anxiety scale. The responses in the trait anxiety scale range from 1(almost never) to 4(almost always). Positively worded statements such as "I feel relaxed" were reversely scored. These items are 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20 in state anxiety scale, and items 21, 23, 26, 27, 30, 32, 33, 34, 36, 39 in the trait anxiety scale.

As for the statistical procedures used in this study, the main statistical technique applied to the data was a correlation between two sets of scores to investigate the possibility of any correspondence between them.

Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated between perfectionism scores, state anxiety, trait anxiety and the four skills of reading, speaking, listening, and writing using SPSS software (version 13). Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated, since according to Hatch and Lazerton (1998), it allows us to establish the strength of continuous variables.

To further analyze the data, t-tests were also run, that is, levels of perfectionism were compared in successful and unsuccessful seniors and juniors. Therefore, academic records were used to identify two groups of students: academically successful students (defined as those with a grade point average above 84%), and academically unsuccessful students (defined as those with a grade point average below 84%). These are not arbitrary criteria. For the students who participated in this study these values have important institutional implications: students in the successful group are considered to be top students and can take more courses for the next term to finish their studies sooner; students in the unsuccessful group are "rusticated" and will be asked to withdraw from the university if their GPA will be less than 59% for two more subsequent terms. The same criteria were set, in this study, to compare successful and unsuccessful students in reading, speaking, listening and writing. The following table illustrates the number of successful and unsuccessful groups in four skills and GPA.

TABLE 1:
THE NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS IN FOUR SKILLS AND GPA

	reading	speaking	listening	writing	GPA
Successful	111	182	186	69	80
Unsuccessful	189	118	114	231	220

III. RESULTS

A. Whole Group

In the following section the results of correlational analyses related to each of the research hypotheses are presented:
H01: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and reading.

TABLE 2:
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM, SKILLS, GPA, AND STATE/TRAIT ANXIETIES

	reading	speaking	listening	writing	GPA	state anxiety	trait anxiety
perfectionism	-.147*	-.234*	-.207*	-.104	-.128*	.656*	.757*

*$p<0.05$

As the table of correlations indicate, there is a significant relationship between the skill of reading and perfectionism ($r=-0.14$, $p<0.05$). The value of correlation coefficient is -0.14 and since sig is lower than p (0.05), the correlation is significant. Moreover, the value of the correlation coefficient is negative, meaning more perfectionism leads to lower reading skill. So, the first null hypothesis is rejected.

H02: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and speaking.

As for the relationship between the skill of speaking and perfectionism, table 2 shows that a significant correlation exits ($r= -0.23$, $p<0.05$), again like the relationship between reading and perfectionism, here the value of the correlation coefficient is negative which is indicative of the fact that more perfectionist language learners get lower scores in the course of speaking So, the second null hypothesis is also rejected.

H03: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and listening.

The third skill that is related to the psychological construct of perfectionism is the skill of listening. As table 2 indicates, the correlation coefficient is 0.20 and although small, is significant ($r=-0.20$, $p<0.05$). Like the other two skills, the value of correlation coefficient is negative, that is, more perfectionist students get lower scores in the course of listening. So, the third null hypothesis is also rejected.

H04: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and writing.

As table 2 exhibits, no significant relationship exits between the skill of writing and perfectionism. The correlation coefficient is 0.10 but the relationship is not significant (sig>0.05). In other words, writing and perfectionism do not seem to be related in any meaningful way. So, among the four skills, writing is the only one which is not significantly related to the psychological construct of perfectionism. So, the null hypothesis is retained.

H05: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and academic achievement (GPA).

The next relationship which is examined in this study is the relationship between students' GPA and their scores on perfectionism scale. Table 2 shows that a significant relationship exists between GPA and perfectionism ($r=-0.12$, $p<0.05$). Like the other correlations in this study, the relationship has a negative value meaning that more perfectionist students get lower GPA. So, the fifth null hypothesis is rejected.

H06: There is no relationship between learner perfectionism and state/trait anxieties.

The next relationship examined is that of state anxiety and perfectionism. As table 2 indicates, there is a significant relationship between these two psychological constructs ($r=0.65$, $p<0.05$). The value of the correlation coefficient is positive, showing that more perfectionist language students experience higher levels of state anxiety.

The relationship between trait anxiety and perfectionism was also investigated. As evident in table 2 a significant relationship exits between the students' scores on perfectionism scale and their scores on the Spielberger's trait anxiety scale ($r=0.75$, $p<0.05$). The positive value of the correlation coefficient is indicative of the fact that more perfectionist students experience higher levels of trait anxiety. So, the sixth null hypothesis is also rejected.

H07: There is no significant difference between gender and perfectionism.

TABLE 3:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

Gender	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	t	Sig(2-tailed)
Perfectionism Male	47	65.9362	12.33307	1.79896	-1.541	.124
Female	253	69.0198	12.64172	.79478		

T-test was run to see if any significant difference exists between male and female with regard to their level of perfectionism. As shown in table 3, there is no significant difference between male and female groups in the level of perfectionism (t=-1.54, p>0.05). So, the null hypothesis is retained.

H08: There is no significant difference between learner perfectionism and age.

Different age groups (4 groups) were also compared with regard to their level of perfectionism. As shown in table 4 the result of one way ANOVA indicates that no significant difference exits between different age groups with regard to perfectionism (F= 0.17, p>0.05). So, the null hypothesis is retained.

TABLE 4:
ONE WAY ANOVA ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AGE GROUPS WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

	N	F	Sig
20-21	143		
22-23	108		
24-25	19	.170	.917
25-…	30		
Total	300		

B. Successful vs. Unsuccessful Students

Another statistical test (t-test) was also employed to further analyze the data related to the first four research hypotheses. Students were divided into successful and unsuccessful groups with regard to their scores in the four skills of reading, speaking, listening, and writing, and then t-test was run and levels of perfectionism were compared in successful and unsuccessful students. These statistical analyses yielded the following results.

TABLE 5:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS (IN READING) WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

	Success	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perfectionism	successful	111	65.5405	12.27991	1.16556	-3.199	.002
	unsuccessful	189	70.2963	12.52177	.99		

As shown in table 5, there is a significant difference between the level of perfectionism of the two groups of successful and unsuccessful students with regard to the skill of reading (t=-3.19, p<0.05). It means that students in the successful group who are less perfectionist (mean=65.54) than unsuccessful students (mean=70.29) outperformed in the skill of reading.

TABLE 6:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS (IN SPEAKING) WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

	Success	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	t	Sig(2-tailed)
Perfectionism	successful	182	66.5549	11.93744	.88486	-3.437	.001
	unsuccessful	118	71.5932	13.08633	1.20469		

As for the skill of speaking, table 6 indicates that there is a significant difference between successful and unsuccessful students in speaking with regard to their level of perfectionism (t=-3.43, p<0.05). Such a result is indicative of the fact that students in the successful group who are less perfectionist (mean=66.55) than those in unsuccessful group who are more perfect (mean=71.59) outperformed in speaking.

TABLE 7:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS (IN LISTENING) WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

	success	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig(2-tailed)
Perfectionism	successful	186	67.1129	12.08855	.88638	-2.517	.012
	unsuccessful	114	70.8596	13.17673	1.23411		

Table 7 demonstrates the results obtained for the skill of listening. As shown in this table, like the other two skills, a significant difference exists between the level of perfectionism of successful and unsuccessful students in listening. It means that the students in the successful group who are less perfectionist (mean=67.11) than the students in the unsuccessful group who are more perfectionist (mean=70.85) did better in the skill of listening.

TABLE 8:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS (IN WRITING) WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

	Success	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	t	Sig(2-tailed)
Perfectionism	successful	69	66.4783	13.12229	1.57974	-1.547	.123
	unsuccessful	231	69.1515	12.43377	.81808		

As exhibited in table 8, there is no significant difference in the level of perfectionism of the two groups of successful and unsuccessful students in writing (t=-1.54, p>0.05).

TABLE 9:
T-TEST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS (IN GPA) WITH REGARD TO PERFECTIONISM

success	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.ErrorMean	t	Sig(2tailed)
Perfectionism successful	80	66.3250	12.70879	1.42089	-1.837	.067
unsuccessful	220	69.3409	12.52458	.84441		

GPA was also another criterion to divide students into successful and unsuccessful groups. As demonstrated in table 9, no significant difference exits between successful and unsuccessful groups with regard to perfectionism (t=-1.83, p>0.05); although the difference between the groups is not statistically significant, the value of sig (0.067) is very near the probability level (0.05).

Altogether, further analyses (t-tests) came up with the same results (except for GPA) as correlational analysis, that is, significant differences obtained in t-tests supported the significant but low value of correlation coefficients of correlational analyses.

IV. DISCUSSION

As the section of results indicates among the four skills of reading, speaking, listening, and writing, the first three were significantly correlated with perfectionism. Since the value of correlation coefficients was negative, this finding is indicative of the fact that more perfectionist students get lower scores in the skills of reading, speaking, and listening.

According to Gregersen & Horwitz (2002), different symptoms of perfectionism in students seem to be counterproductive to any kind of learning, symptoms such as high performance standards, procrastination, long delays in completing assignments, error phobia, fear of negative evaluation, etc. For example fear of committing errors and negative evaluation of others are likely to be manifested in a student's overconcern with evaluation of his/her performance and competence in the target language. Such students would rarely start conversation and interact very little with other students in a speaking class. According to Gregerson and Horwitz (2002), such students tend to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities that could increase their language skills, and may even avoid class entirely; they would want to speak flawlessly, with no grammatical or pronunciation errors, and as easily as a native speaker. Instead of presenting less-than perfect language skills and exposing themselves to the possible negative reactions of others, perfectionist students would prefer to remain silent, waiting until they are certain how to express their thoughts. So, it seems that rather than focusing on learning, perfectionist students spend their energy on avoiding mistakes.

Such excessively high standards for performance accompanied by overly critical self evaluations create the ideal condition for the development of language anxiety in perfectionist students which may be one of the possible factors contributing to lower achievement in language skills of perfectionist students.

According to Gregesen and Horwitz (2002), anxious learners tend to overestimate the number and seriousness of their errors whereas the non-anxious students tend toward underestimation. Moreover, anxious learners view their performance as being constantly evaluated by teachers and peers; whereas the non-anxious learners rely on self evaluation and generally evaluate themselves positively.

Being highly concerned about mistakes, as found by Frost, Turcotte, Heimberg, Mattia, Holt, and Hope (1995), is accompanied by negative affect, lower self confidence, and a greater feeling that they should have performed better on a task, greater distress regarding mistakes, lamenting mistakes to a greater degree, a greater concern over the negative reactions of others, and a greater desire to keep mistakes a secret. Such an array of negative affective reactions may also contribute to the lower achievement of such language learners.

All in all, it should be noted that anxiety and perfectionism make language learning an unpleasant experience and can be one possible contribution to the lower foreign language achievement levels in such students.

Along with the four skills, students' overall academic achievement (GPA) was found to be significantly correlated with their scores on perfectionism scale, and since the value of the correlation coefficient was negative, this result indicates that more perfectionist students have lower academic achievement. This finding of the present study can be interpreted in light of previous studies which examined the relationship between perfectionism and academic performance. The results of these studies consistently confirmed the hypothesis that symptoms of perfectionism in students can cause different problems such as more distress, academic procrastination, (Ferrari, 1992), academic burnout (Zhang et al, 2007), high concerns about mistakes (Frost et al.,1995), experiencing more negative affect around examinations (Brown et al., 1999), and many of other problems. So, maybe the lower academic achievement of more perfectionist students in academic courses can be attributed to such factors found in previous studies.

Consistent with many previous studies (e.g. Blankstein, Flett, Hewitt, & Eng, 1993), on the relationship between the two constructs of perfectionism and anxiety, results of the present study showed a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and both state and trait anxieties among students of English as a foreign language, meaning that more perfectionist students experience higher levels of state and trait anxiety. Such a relationship may be attributed to different features of perfectionism. As mentioned it was mentioned, perfectionists are individuals who believe that they

can and should achieve perfect performance, perceive anything less than perfect performance as unsatisfactory and are highly concerned about their mistakes. Thus, perfectionist individuals are likely to be unsatisfied with their performance and experience more anxiety.

As mentioned in the results section, the statistical analyses revealed that no significant difference exits between different age groups with regard to the construct of perfectionism. This is true of gender, that is, male and female students do not differ significantly in the level of perfectionism. So, the last two hypotheses of the present study are rejected meaning that students of different ages and sexes did not show any significant difference with regard to the scores they got on the perfectionism scale. However, more investigation with other larger groups is needed to see whether such a result is replicated.

V. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the results section, the results of the correlational analyses and t-tests indicated a negative significant relationship between reading and perfectionism, that is, more perfectionist language learners get lower scores in the course of reading. This finding may be interpreted with reference to factors such as the reading skill, and what happens in our reading classes. Perfectionist students set high performance standards, are not satisfied with anything short of perfection, and are highly critical of mistakes. These characteristics of perfectionist individuals seem to be in contrast to what is involved in the process of reading. In reading a passage, sometimes the whole meaning of a sentence or paragraph cannot be achieved due to some cultural references or unknown words or structures. Therefore, the reader should be able to deal with some degree of certainty, should make the meaning using what he knows, and should sometimes guess to fill the gaps in his/her competence; a perfectionist seem to have difficulty in this regard. Moreover, perfectionist students experience higher levels of anxiety which may cause some difficulty with efficient use of reading strategies.

Besides, unfortunately our reading classes mostly center on translation, pronunciation practice, and detailed analysis of new words and altogether encourage intensive reading. Extensive reading and teaching strategies such as guessing which are overlooked in our classes can help learners to get away with their tendency to look up words they do not know and read for understanding a passage as a whole.

The relationship between perfectionism and speaking may also be interpreted with reference to characteristics of perfectionist individuals and also our speaking classes. Because perfectionist learners set high standards of performance, and are concerned with mistakes, they would not be satisfied with only communicating in a speaking class; they would want to speak without any pronunciation or grammatical errors. Therefore, they may withhold their guesses and prefer to remain silent. This characteristic of these learners will make them not to have enough classroom participation which may both affect their speaking practice and the teacher's overall evaluation of that silent student. Moreover, in some courses of speaking the teacher himself increases the students' error phobia by emphasizing different types of errors when a student starts speaking. Finally, higher degrees of anxiety in perfectionist learners can itself be an important factor contributing to lower speaking performance of such learners.

The association between perfectionism and listening could be attributed to characteristics of a perfectionist learner. Maybe, characteristics such as overconcern with mistakes, higher levels of anxiety, and consequent lower class participation contributes to lower achievement of more perfectionist learners in listening courses.

Writing and perfectionism were not found to be significantly related. This finding may be due to several factors. Perhaps, such courses as letter writing or grammar used as a measure of writing skill should not have been considered in this study, and more direct courses of writing such as paragraph development and advanced writing were more relevant. Another factor may be the subjective process involved in score giving of writing exams which may have affected the data in the present study. Anyhow, testing a larger population of language learners will give us more evidence to either confirm or reject such a result.

The relationship between state/trait anxieties and perfectionism seems to be sensible and logical. Higher levels of anxiety in more perfectionist learners can be attributed to high performance standards they set for themselves that cannot be met satisfactorily. Moreover, concern over mistakes and fear of negative evaluation can both cause perfectionist learners to experience higher levels of anxiety.

The results of this study also highlighted the association between students' GPA and the scores they get on the perfectionism scale. Factors such as procrastination in getting started, long delays in completing assignments, more anxiety for examinations may contribute to the lower overall academic achievement of more perfectionist students.

As another finding, different age groups do not differ in their perfectionism level. It seems that the construct of perfectionism remains fixed in different ages. The results of this study also did not show a difference in the perfectionism level between male and female students. It seems that this personal feature presents itself in both sexes with no difference.

Certain practical points can be discerned from the present study. These implications will be discussed in the following sections in some detail. The present study showed that how perfectionist tendencies in language learners are associated with low academic achievement in general and poor performance in different language skills. These findings can have several pedagogical implications for the authorities in charge of our educational system, for our language learners and teachers.

This study espouses the idea that following the standards or searching for "the best" cannot be much logical. In fact, it supports the ideas and ideals behind postmodern philosophy, a philosophy that along a wide variety of disciplines have influenced the field of English language teaching in western countries (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, in press). This philosophy is a reaction against absolutism and rejects the ideas of "the best" or "the perfect". In fact, relativism, "the better" rather than "the best" is valued in this mode of thought. Reducing individual differences and making students conform to and move toward one unified and global ideal is replaced, in this paradigm, by considering individual differences and each individual's construction of reality (Williams & Burden, 1997).

However, no vestige of this philosophy, which is practiced in academic circles in the western world, is witnessed in different levels of education, including English language teaching, in our country (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, in press). This study highlights this need for a shift from the modern era of education, to a constructivist, postmodern view, along with the shift which has occurred in the western world.

Students should become conscious that setting perfectionist high standards and striving for perfection may have a paralyzing effect on their achievement. As suggested by Ramirez (1999), perfectionists must learn to treat their unrealistic self-beliefs as hypotheses instead of facts. When an individual's underlying self-beliefs are restated as suggestions, the individual is often better able to consider a current situation in conjunction with other evidence, such as past experiences and opinions of others, in order to modify questionable beliefs (Ramirez, 1999).

Language learners should learn to set real goals for learning a language and avoid setting ideal and sometimes far-fetched goals for themselves. They should become aware that the notion of native speaker and defining one's foreign language proficiency in terms of a native speaker competence has been abandoned by the authorities (Widdowson, 2003; Seildhofer, 2000). They should know that we do not have one perfect form of English spoken by native speakers, rather we have different Englishes, and that a small percentage of L2 users can evolve into native speakers of the target language.

Though the focus of the present study was learner perfectionism, and the role of teacher perfectionism was not investigated, it seems likely that part of learner perfectionism, especially socially-prescribed perfectionism, can be shaped by teachers. Therefore, language teachers must be aware of how their personal preferences and beliefs about language learning can shape the students' ideas of what it takes to be a successful language learner.

Language teachers must know their crucial role as a person who carries much weight in the classroom and a model who is sometimes faithfully followed. They should be sensitized toward perfectionism in general as an educational problem that must be fully understood and efficiently handled.

Language teachers should become aware how their immediate and sometimes harsh reactions to an error can make a classroom a site of fear of anxiety, cause error phobia in learners, and make language learning an unpleasant experience for learners.

Teachers should be cautious not to shatter students' self-confidence which is according to Brown (2001) an important factor in what a learner achieves in learning a language. However, this factor is sometimes overlooked by teachers by an overemphasis on seemingly negative points, which, according to Seildhofer (2000), are not justified to be referred to as error, if the majority of the world's L2 English speakers produce and understand it.

So, language teachers should know how to treat errors and provide feedback to the learners. In fact, they should consider different treatment options; they should decide whether to treat or ignore, and if they want to treat, they should decide when to treat, who will treat, and how to treat a deviant form of English, not to cause error phobia, and fear of risk taking, or shatter students' self confidence.

Finally, it should be noted that nagging or criticizing perfectionist students or giving them additional time to complete assignments only encourage more perfectionism. Therefore, teachers are expected to try the following:

[1] building a friendly, supportive learning environment;

[2] establishing the expectation that mistakes are a normal part of the learning process;

[3] presenting themselves as helpful instructors concerned primarily with promoting student learning, rather than as authority figures concerned primarily with evaluating student performance;

[4] articulating expectations that express learning and improvement over perfect performance of assignments;

[5] explaining how perfectionism is counterproductive;

[6] reassuring perfectionist students that they will get the help they need to achieve success;

[7] following through with help, and communicating teacher approval of students' progress and accomplishments. (p.2, cited in Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002)

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