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## **The Excellencism and Perfectionism Model and Its Connections with Quality of Life. The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in the Relationship Between Excellencism and Quality of Life**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/PBE.2026.009>

### **Abstract**

**Background:** Perfectionism has been studied for many years. The research results on this construct are ambiguous. On the one hand, its adaptative significance is indicated; on the other, its maladaptiveness. The model of excellencism and perfectionism was created to differentiate between the two features and define them. It is relevant to research because it allows for the determination of whether perfectionism is basically healthy, unnecessary, or maladaptive. The following mediation hypothesis was put forward: self-efficacy is a mediator in the relationship between excellencism and quality of life. The present study is exploratory in nature in terms of the relationships between perfectionism, self-efficacy and quality of life.

**Material and Methods:** A cross-sectional study on 346 adult participants was conducted. The Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE), abbreviated Quality of Life Assessment Questionnaire (WHOQOL-Bref) and Self-Efficacy subscale from the Spirituality Index of Well-Being were used. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis on SCOPE was conducted and r-Pearson correlations were calculated. Mediation analysis with the

use of Model 4 (Mediation in macro-PROCESS) was conducted using the bootstrap method.

**Results:** The partial mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between excellencism and quality of life was confirmed. The results also show an absence of connections between perfectionism and quality of life and self-efficacy.

**Conclusions:** Excellencism is positively and directly associated with quality of life and via self-efficacy, whereas perfectionism, in the current set of results, seems to be an unnecessary trait.

**Keywords:** excellencism, perfectionism, self-efficacy, quality of life, striving.

## Introduction

Perfectionism is a personality style described as an individual's setting very high, frequently unrealistic standards and expectations for themselves, and striving to realize them flawlessly (Piotrowski & Bojanowska, 2021). Scholars have looked at perfectionism in a variety of ways: as a unidimensional, multi-dimensional or transdiagnostic construct. Perfectionism has been discussed and studied for many decades (Flett & Hewitt, 2020). Research on this trait has flourished since the repositioning of perfectionism as a multidimensional construct (Gaudreau, 2019). One of the most popular models of perfectionism has been put forward by Frost et al. (1990), in which perfectionism is defined as being characterized by the holding of oneself to very high standards of functioning and a preference for organization, which is connected with a tendency to be overly self-critical (intolerant towards mistakes and errors and the undermining of the quality of one's performance). The authors of the model created the *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale*, which also has a Polish adaptation (Piotrowski & Bojanowska, 2021). There are six dimensions of perfectionism listed in the scale: Personal Standards (very high standards of self-evaluation), Concern over Mistakes (negative reactions to one's mistakes), Doubts about Actions (doubts about one's abilities and the quality of one's performance), Parental Criticism (perception of parents as overly critical), Parental Expectations (perception of parents as highly demanding), Organization (attaching great importance to order and good organization).

Meta-analyses of the discussed construct have shown many of its negative consequences: burnout, procrastination, depression, anxiety, suicidal tendencies and psychopathological features. These findings have led to the treatment of perfectionism as a transdiagnostic trait (Gaudreau, 2019; Wang et al., 2022; Lunn et al., 2023) and to the development of research on intervention and prevention (Gaudreau, 2019; Goudarzi et al., 2021). These studies indicate that perfectionism has a maladaptive dimension which is mainly related to concern over mistakes and doubts about actions (Piotrowski & Bojanowska, 2021).

On the other hand, the literature also points to positive consequences of perfectionism. For example, Waleriańczyk and Stolarski's (2021) research suggests a positive effect of perfectionistic striving in distance running. Such results also confirm the thesis that perfectionism can also have an adaptive dimension (Hamachek, 1978; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In general, the dimensions of personal and organizational standards are considered to have positive effects (Piotrowski & Bojanowska, 2021).

Patrick Gaudreau (2019) emphasizes that differentiating between excellence and perfectionism is important in research in order to determine whether the former is basically healthy (adaptive), unnecessary, or maladaptive. The author created the model of excellencism and perfectionism, in which he recognized, defined and made a distinction between these two traits. Excellencism is the tendency to set goals that have high, but at the same time achievable standards and to strive towards them in an effortful, engaged and determined but flexible way. Perfectionism, in turn, is the tendency to set idealized, flawless and excessively high standards and strive to achieve them relentlessly. Perfection is not excellence: excellence can be attained without perfection. On the other hand, perfection cannot be attained without excellence. Moreover, excellencism operates without perfectionistic concerns: "Perfectionism starts where excellencism ends" (Gaudreau et al., 2024). In his model, Gaudreau (2019) refers to the analogy of the rate of returns (law of diminishing returns), showing that an increase in the degree of input invested in a task causes an initial increase in task performance (zone of increasing returns). Beyond a certain point, however, investing additional resources in

the task will not make it more efficient than it was initially. At first people enter a zone of diminishing returns (additional efforts yield smaller improvements in task performance); after that a person may enter a zone of decreasing returns (additional efforts yield unexpected decreases in task performance). The law of diminishing returns causes feelings of inadequacy and undermines the resources needed to be successful, especially while striving to realize excessive, idealized aims (the risk of backfire).

Self-efficacy is a key component of Bandura's social cognitive theory and is considered an integral social competence. It refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully manage dynamic conditions, face challenges in various life situations, and achieve expected goals (Bandura, 1997). In previous studies, excellencism was positively correlated with self-efficacy and at the same time was a predictor of proactive strategies for coping with stress (Samfira & Palos, 2021). Other results have also shown that self-efficacy is positively correlated with adaptive perfectionism and negatively with maladaptive perfectionism (Kurtovic et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy is linked to quality of life (Matos et al., 2022). The World Health Organization defines quality of life as an individual's perception of their position in life, considering cultural context, personal goals, values, expectations, norms, and concerns (WHO, 2024). Quality of life is a subjective, multidimensional, and integrative construct that reflects optimal well-being and positive health.

Previous research shows that interventions aimed at reducing perfectionism improve quality of life (Goudarzi et al., 2021). Other research indicates that excellencism correlates more strongly with psychological well-being than perfectionism. Moreover, excellencism is negatively related to psychological distress, while perfectionism is related positively (With et al., 2024).

This pattern of previous research findings suggests more optimal functioning for those with high levels of excellence, while the relationships between perfectionism, self-efficacy, and quality of life remain ambiguous. The present study is exploratory in nature in terms of the relationships between perfectionism and the above-mentioned variables. In relation to excellencism, the

following research hypothesis was put forward: self-efficacy is a mediator in the relationship between excellencism and quality of life.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

Prior to the study, approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland (KEUS360/03.2023). The study was conducted using a diagnostic survey method, employing a questionnaire. All respondents, as well as student volunteers who assisted as interviewers, provided informed consent to participate. Data collection took place in 2023–2024, using the snowball method.

### **Statistical analysis**

All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS (version 29) and IBM SPSS AMOS 29, with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ . Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and r-Pearson correlations were calculated. Mediation analysis with the use of Model 4 (Mediation w macro-PROCESS) was conducted using the bootstrap method in which the HC4 Cribari-Neto heteroscedasticity-consistent standard error estimator was applied (Hayes & Cai, 2007). Indirect effects were estimated using the bootstrap method with bias correction at 5000 replicates, producing 95% confidence intervals (CI). Non-standardized regression coefficients – the values of the individual pathways – were reported as recommended (Hayes, 2007; Preacher et al., 2018).

### **Participants**

A total of 346 participants were included in the study, with 55.2% ( $n=191$ ) women and 44.8% ( $n=155$ ) men. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 60 ( $M=29.31$ ;  $SD=11.76$ ). Among them, 42.5% ( $n=147$ ) were students, while 57.5% ( $n=199$ ) were employed.

## Research tools

### Excellencism and Perfectionism

The Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE; Gaudreau & Schellenberg, 2018) was used. The original English scale was translated into Polish. The sample was divided into 2 groups. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted (using *Oblimin* rotation) on the first group (N=174). The principal component method was used. As expected, both the Kaiser criterion and the scree plot indicated two significant components that together explained 68.51% of the variance. All 22 items were arranged into factors according to the original division into the Perfectionism and Excellencism scales. However, factor loading analysis revealed cross-loadings. Items were selected for subsequent analyses according to the following criteria: factor loading of the basic factor was above 0.7 and simultaneously for the second factor loading was below 0.5. Four items for the Perfectionism scale (16, 17, 21, 22) and three for Excellencism (5, 7, 8) remained.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted on the second group (N=172). The first verified model (two factors: Excellencism and Perfectionism which included items selected on the criteria described above) was not a good enough fitted to the data ( $\chi^2=39.05$ ,  $df=13$ ,  $p<0.05$ ;  $\chi^2/df=3.004$ ; GFI=0.947; AGFI=0.886; NFI=0.944; TLI=0.938; CFI=0.962; RMSEA=0.108). Analysis revealed that items 17 and 22 had correlated error variances. The appropriate covariance parameters were introduced into Model 2, which turned out to be better fitted to the data. The value of the Akaike information criterion (AIC) confirmed the better parameters of Model 2 (Model 1: AIC=69.047 vs Model 2: AIC=53.044). The properties of Model 2 proved to be satisfactory ( $\chi^2=21.044$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p=0.05$ ;  $\chi^2/df=1.754$ ; GFI=0.967; AGFI=0.923; NFI=0.970; TLI=0.977; CFI=0.987; RMSEA=0.066). The reliability of the scales prepared in this way was highly satisfactory (for Perfectionism:  $\alpha=0.905$ ; for Excellencism:  $\alpha=0.811$ ).

In order to verify the validity of Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism the scales were correlated with the Polish adaptation of the *Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale* (FMPS; Piotrowski & Bojanowska, 2021),

which consists of the following subscales: Personal Standards, Concern over Mistakes, Doubts about Actions, Parental Expectations, Parental Criticism, Organization. The r-Pearson correlation coefficients obtained are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson's correlation coefficients between SCOPE and FMPS

|                       | <b>Personal Standards (FMPS)</b> | <b>Concern over Mistakes (FMPS)</b> | <b>Doubts about Actions (FMPS)</b> | <b>Parental Expectations (FMPS)</b> | <b>Parental Criticism (FMPS)</b> | <b>Organization (FMPS)</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Perfectionism (SCOPE) | 0.372**                          | 0.273**                             | 0.069 n.s.                         | 0.241**                             | 0.194**                          | 0.333**                    |
| Excellencism (SCOPE)  | 0.421**                          | 0.046 n.s.                          | -0.009 n.s.                        | 0.103 n.s.                          | -0.029 n.s.                      | 0.209**                    |

\* $<0.05$ ; \*\* $<0.01$ ; n.s.- non significant.

Sources: Author's own research.

The results of the correlation coefficients were close to expected. The Excellencism scale was positively correlated only with Personal Standards and Organization and was not correlated with the rest of the FMPS subscales, while Perfectionism was positively correlated with all of the FMPS subscales (except for Doubts about Actions). Additionally, the correlation between Perfectionism (SCOPE) and Excellencism (SCOPE) was positive and statistically significant ( $r=0.433$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and the result similar to the report previous mentioned (0.493;  $p<0.01$ ; Gaudreau et al., 2024).

## Quality of life

Quality of Life was assessed using a modified Polish adaptation of the abbreviated Quality of Life Assessment Questionnaire (WHOQOL-Bref; WHO, 2024), which consisted of 15 items (the Environmental and Somatic Domains were omitted, while questions about satisfaction in different spheres of life were added). Respondents referred to the previous four weeks of their lives and answered for the first question ("How do you rate your quality of life?") on a 5-point scale: 1 – Very bad; 2 – Bad; 3 – Neither good nor bad; 4 – Good;

5 – Very good. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of five questions about satisfaction with health, education/work, achievements, physical fitness and social relations, to which respondents, referring to the previous four weeks of their lives, answered on 5-point scale: 1 – very dissatisfied; 2 – not satisfied; 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 – satisfied; 5 – very satisfied. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of nine questions appropriate for the Psychological and Social Domains of the original version. However, the response scale was unified. The respondents answered the aforementioned 9 question on 5-point scale: 1 – not at all; 2 – a little; 3 – moderately, 4 – to a large extent; 5 – to a very large extent. The answers to the last question were reversed. The results were presented as General Quality of Life (the sum of all answers) and separately for the first question (Quality of Life), for the second part of the questionnaire (Life Satisfaction; the sum of the answers for 5 questions) and for the third part of the questionnaire (Psychosocial Quality of Life; the sum of the answers for question 7–15). The higher scores indicated a greater quality of life. Cronbach's Alpha for Life Satisfaction was  $\alpha=0.697$ , while for Psychosocial Quality of Life it was  $\alpha=0.821$ . The level of reliability of the scales was sufficient for scientific research.

### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy was measured using the Self-efficacy subscale from the Spirituality Index of Well-Being (Daaleman & Frey, 2004). The subscale consists of six statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly agree; 5 – Strongly disagree), with higher scores indicating a greater sense of self-efficacy. The reliability of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.824.

### **Results**

The results of correlation analysis are presented in Table 2. A positive direct correlation was observed between Excellencism and Quality of Life, Life Satisfaction, Psychosocial Quality of Life, as well as General Quality of Life. Excellencism also showed a positive correlation with Self-efficacy, and Quality

of Life was positively correlated with Self-efficacy. Perfectionism was correlated only with Excellencism. The pattern of results confirms the possibility of the mediation of Self-efficacy in the relationship between Excellencism and Quality of Life. Due to the fact that all the dimensions of the latter were correlated strongly and positively, in a verified mediation model the General Quality of Life variable was used.

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficients between SCOPE, Self-efficacy and Quality of Life

|                                  | 1             | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5       | 6       |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Perfectionism (1)                | -             | -       | -       | -       | -       | -       |
| Excellencism (2)                 | 0.433**       | -       | -       | -       | -       | -       |
| Self-efficacy (3)                | 0.015<br>n.s. | 0.143** | -       | -       | -       | -       |
| Quality of Life (4)              | 0.062<br>n.s. | 0.236** | 0.406** | -       | -       | -       |
| Life Satisfaction (5)            | 0.074<br>n.s. | 0.154** | 0.509** | 0.560** | -       | -       |
| Psychosocial Quality of Life (6) | 0.003<br>n.s. | 0.171** | 0.528** | 0.541** | 0.728** | -       |
| General Quality of Life (7)      | 0.033<br>n.s. | 0.187** | 0.563** | 0.639** | 0.881** | 0.962** |

\* $<0.05$ ; \*\* $<0.01$ ; n.s. – non significant

Sources: Author's own research.

Total effect of Excellencism on General Quality of Life ( $c=0.541$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) proved to be statistically significant. The model with a single predictor of Quality of Life explained only 3.49% of the variance in this variable.

The results of the mediation analysis were presented in Figure 1. The mediation model explained 32.8% of the variance of the General Quality of Life variable. People with higher Excellencism demonstrate higher levels of Self-efficacy ( $a=0.226$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), and higher Self-efficacy is associated with higher General Quality of Life ( $b=0.997$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). A 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrap samples indicated that the indirect effect through Self-efficacy (IE:  $ab=0.225$ ) was entirely above zero

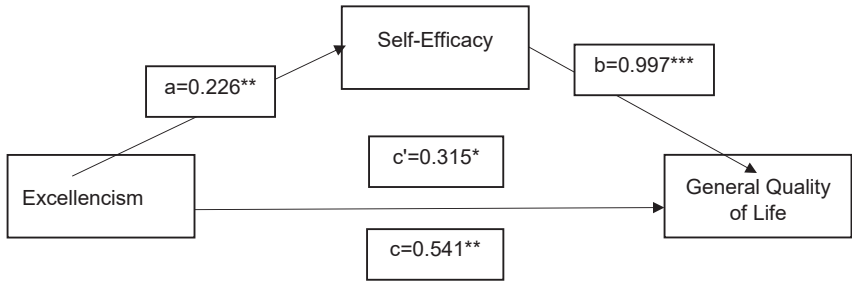


Figure 1. Mediation model for the effect of Excellencism on General Quality of Life, where the mediator is the level of Self-Efficacy

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; all presented effects are unstandardized.

Sources: Author's own research.

(LLCI=0,0615; ULCI=0,4077). Taking into account the indirect effect of Excellencism on General Quality of Life (and taking into account Self-efficacy), the direct effect of Excellencism on General Quality of Life partially disappears ( $c'=0.315$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). The results therefore support the hypothesis of a partial mediating role of Self-efficacy in the relationship between Excellencism and General Quality of Life.

## Discussion

The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis of the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between Excellencism and Quality of Life. However, the mediation is partial. The first mechanism is that of setting high standards for oneself and flexibly striving to achieve them (with a simultaneous lack of concerns over mistakes, which are somehow inherent in the process of achieving goals; see Table 1) through work and putting effort into it increasing the probability of achieving success in various tasks, which results in an increased sense of self-efficacy. The relations are in line with a previous study (Samfira & Palos, 2021). Self-efficacy is in turn linked to Quality of Life, because it is associated with a positive evaluation of oneself, one's achievements and positive emotions (especially joy and pride; Keller et al., 2024).

In turn, the direct relationship between Excellencism and Quality of Life can be explained by the flexibility of people striving for excellence in achieving their goals, as indicated by the weak correlation with the Organization sub-scale (FMPS; Table 1). People with a high level of excellencism are probably able not only to work, but also to adjust their schedule to current needs and to enjoy life, which in turn is associated with a better perception of their quality of life and satisfaction with it. These results confirm the research results which show that strivers towards excellence savor their experience and performance to a greater extent than strivers towards perfection, regardless of the results (Gaudreau et al., 2024).

In addition, variables related to perceived stress and social connection and support are probably important from the perspective of Quality of Life. Excellencism was associated with active coping strategies (Samfira & Palos, 2021) and self-compassion (With et al., 2024), which in turn can result in a lower level of perceived stress. Other research results indicate the positive relationships between excellencism and extraversion and agreeableness (Bien et al., 2024), the need for affiliation and social relationships (Andrade et al., 2025), orientation towards the development of social skills, and negative relationships with the feeling of loneliness (Petrin-Pomerlau et al., 2024). Social connection, support and stress may potentially constitute further mediators in the relationship between excellencism and quality of life.

In relation to perfectionism, the results of this study indicate that it has no significant relationship with either self-efficacy or quality of life. In the context of the moderate correlation of this variable with the Organization scale (Table 1), it may indicate a more rigid attachment to the performance tasks and the time devoted to them; and in the context of the described law of diminishing returns (Gaudreau, 2019), it may be that despite the attempt to maintain high standards, which initially has positive effect to a certain degree (excellencism), this not result in positive results but rather causes burnout and negative emotions. At the same time, perfectionists are able to enjoy experiences and the results of their actions at a similar level to strivers towards excellence only in the situation of achieving an idealized goal (Gaudreau et al., 2024), which may neutralize the negative effect on self-efficacy and quality of life.

Perfectionism is double-edged sword, which results in a lack of connection with quality of life and self-efficacy.

## **Limitations and directions for future research**

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the sample included only adults, which limits the generalizability of the findings to more diverse age groups. Second, all measures were based on self-report, which may be subject to social desirability. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences regarding the relationships between variables.

Therefore, future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs, as well as multi-method approaches, to better capture causal processes. Furthermore, differences should be examined also in younger age groups. Moreover, future studies should examine the role of motivation and differences in parents' parenting approaches in shaping excellencism. Such differentiation will allow teachers and parents to build appropriate motivational and evaluation systems.

## **Practical implications**

Promoting excellence has key practical pedagogical implications. Education should focus on raising standards and pushing one's limits by setting ambitious yet achievable goals, which builds perseverance and self-efficacy, and improves quality of life. Individualization strategies, enabling individuals to strive for their best and avoiding uniformity, will potentially be important.

## **Conclusions**

Excellencism is positively and directly associated with quality of life, as well as via self-efficacy, whereas perfectionism is an ambiguous construct and correlation analysis shows no relationship between it and quality of life or self-efficacy. In the current set of results, perfectionism seems to be suboptimal and therefore unnecessary.

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