



The Relationship Between Iraqi EFL Learners' Perfectionism, Self-Regulation, and Language Learning

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Abstract

The concept of perfectionism has been associated with a huge number of unfavorable and favorable psychosocial outcomes. Anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and behavior discipline are some of these unfavorable outcomes (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Accordingly, the current study was conducted on a population of 150 male and female Iraqi language learners. To do the study, practically, Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) was distributed among the language learners; then, since the study is correlational design research, the researcher distributed the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) in order to collect the learners' viewpoints about the level of self-regulation. The findings, indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between learners' perfectionism and language achievement among the Iraqi language learners. In addition, positive correlation was found between learners' self-regulation and their language achievement. Consequently, the implication of the study demonstrated that those learners with perfectionist ideas in their mind can achieve threshold level of education comparing with those who lack such a mindset. In addition, it was implied that learners can take advantage from learning self-regulated skills by integrating them in their process of learning, which may help them become independent and facilitate the process of self-learning among the learners.

1.Introduction

Giving the global social interest in performance and excellence, the need to establish high standards went up in schools. The learners' perfectionist propensity is increased nowadays by some certain parameters of the educational system: the rise of the school's quality, the focus on the social comparison, the salience of self-other evaluations, and the preoccupation for self -development and assertion (Rice, Richardson, & Ray, 2016). 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). 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 dysfunction ally depressed (Hollander, 1965).

Most of the investigations conducted 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 studying 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.

Another variable of the present study is self-regulation that is referred to how students become masters of their own learning processes. Neither a mental ability nor a performance skill, self-regulation is instead the self-directive process through which learners transform their mental abilities into task-related skills in diverse areas of functioning, such as academia, sports, music, and health (Zimmerman, 2001). Besides, self-regulated learning concerns the application of general models of regulation and self-regulation to issues of learning, in particular academic learning that occurs in school or classroom contexts. An important aspect of models of self-regulation is that individuals regulate towards a goal, thereby implicating the motivational system. Pintrich (2000) has proposed a general model that links different goal orientations to various self-regulatory processes related to academic learning. A hallmark of this model is the importance of integrating both cognitive and motivational components in learning. In this study, general model to understanding how goal orientations and self-regulated learning processes might operate for individuals learning English will be explored.

Accordingly, the objective of the present study is to discover the relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' perfectionism, self-regulation, and language achievement. Therefore, by using a correlational design, the researcher will intend to discover if there is any significant relationship between the learners' perfectionism, self-regulation and their language achievement.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

One of the problems related to the learners' lack of perfectionism is their lack of self-confidence since perfectionism is defined as a belief that perfection should be strived for; perfectionists are people, who strive to meet very high standards in everything they do, and even follow unrealistically high goals across any domains, be it in the workplace, in sport, cooking, etc (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). 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 dysfunction

ally depressed (Hullender, 1965) related to the learners' perfectionism is a work-related problem found in the work of some individual learners' performance in the EFL classes. Accordingly, this type of mentality can heighten the learners' knowledge and performance and effectively improves the learners' performance. Besides, keeping self-regulated learning that is defined as the ability to regulate one's thoughts and actions to attain goals and requires the learners' plans and behaviors to achieve learning goals.

What has made the researcher to peruse this investigation is to unveil the reasons for the learners' inadequacy in the following areas, low metacognitive skills such as self-regulation and also their lack of self-confidence and underestimating their abilities and talents which can be solvable by considering perfectionism. Therefore, what the researcher observed to be effectual in carrying out this study is to facilitate the EFL learners' process of learning by creating some ignition in their mind regarding their capabilities and talents plus their awareness of their self-regulated learning that is connected with their learning based on timing strategies for learning and practicing the learning materials in a very exact and timing program. In addition, the researcher also aims to create a connection between perfectionism and self-regulated learning as well as the learners' achievement in language learning.

Literature review

The literature review was undertaken focusing on definitions of perfectionism; studies that focused on how perfectionism and low self-esteem are related to other disorders; and factors that affect the development of perfectionism. Cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy (CBP) treatment and perfectionism, in conjunction with low self-esteem, was of particular relevance and was also perused. As there appeared to be sparse literature in relation to perfectionism, low self-esteem, psychopathology and treatment, a wide range of sources were used. The self-regulation construct was also reviewed in this manner. The internet was used to access websites, which provided numerous further links including Google Scholar. Various databases were used, for example, Medscape, PubMed Query, PsychNet, Cambridge Journals. Bibliography, such as, peer-reviewed journals and books

were reviewed. In addition, several unpublished pieces of work were reviewed from databases such as Open thesis and ProQuest.

The Diverse Definitions of Perfectionism

From a historical standpoint, perfectionists were mainly characterized as those who set for themselves idealistically high and rather unattainable goals which make them constantly dissatisfied with their perceived failures while disregarding their accomplishments, (Antony & Swinson, 1998). As Burns (1980) noted perfectionist individuals cannot stand mistakes inasmuch as only a perceived minor error would be considered as a downright failure even at the expense of questioning their self-worth. Within such a conceptualization, perfectionism has been associated with or conducive to many different psychological problems such as depression (Klibert et al., 2014).

Besides, one of the earliest definitions was proposed by Horney (1950) who described perfectionism as ‘the Tyranny of the shoulds’ and ‘the practice of demanding of one self or others, a higher quality of performance that is required by the situation’ (Hollender, 1965, p.94). Horney (1950) viewed perfectionists as ‘neurotics’ who attempt to create an impossible image of themselves resembling an ideal image that meets unrealistically high standards. Building upon Horney’s definition, Hollender (1965) underlined that perfectionists have the tendency to focus on their mistakes and whatever goes wrong as opposed to what goes well:

‘The person is constantly on the alert for what is wrong and seldom focuses on what is right. He looks so intently for defects or flaws that he lives his life as though he were an inspector at the end of the production line’ (p.95).

The process of focusing on mistakes was also underlined by Beck (1976). He identified that the tendency to focus on ‘mistakes’ and ‘flaws’ was a characteristic of depressed clients and very much linked to low self-esteem and perfectionism. He argued that: The process of setting high standards in perfectionism was also identified by Hamacheck (1978) who argued that perfectionists:

‘stew endlessly in emotional juices of their own brewing about whether they are doing the task right; the tasks are not translated into doing one’s best, but rather, doing

better than ever before; their efforts never seem quite good enough, but it seems that person should do better (p.27). Therefore they set unreasonably high standards and may over- value performance and undervalue the self' (p.29).

Hamacheck (1978) identified that a factor linked to perfectionism is the fear of failure. He stated that 'perfectionists' are constantly alert and defensive to avoid failure.

The process that perfectionists set high standards was also adapted by Burns (1980). He proposed that people with perfectionism set unrealistic standards; adhered to them in a very rigid manner;

interpreted those in a distorted manner; and define themselves in terms of their achievements. He reported that striving for perfection includes a harsh price to pay. He specifically defined perfectionists as

3. Method

Participants

In the present study, a population of 150 Iraqi EFL learners were selected from both schools and English language institutes from Maysan, Iraq. The learners who were selected were mostly learning the language at public schools as well as Private English institutes. Besides, the language learners were selected based on the Convenience Sampling Method. The participants were a combination of males and females with age ranges between 12-18.

Instruments and data collection

The MPS is a 45-item self-report measure that assesses perfectionism over three distinct scales. The Self-Oriented Perfectionism (MPS-Self) scale measures high achievement expectations and striving for perfectionism (e.g., "One of my goals is to be

perfect in everything I do”). The Other-Oriented Perfectionism (MPS-Other) scale measures the expectations of perfectionism from others (e.g. “If I ask someone to do something, I expect it to be done flawlessly”). The Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism (MPS-Soc) scale measures concerns over meeting the expectations of others (e.g., “The better I do, and the better I am expected to do”). Respondents are asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements based on a 7-point Liker-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Procedure of the Study

In the current study, first, the researcher selected a population 150 Iraqi EFL learners from both public schools and language institute based on the Convenience Sampling Method from English language institutes of Maysan, Iraq. The participants were a combination of males and females language learners with age ranges of 14-18. Then, the researcher after obeying the ethical regulations like pre-talking with the school heads as well as the targeted population distributed Perfectionism Scale for measuring learners’ perfectionism. For the next step, the researcher distributed the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) among the participants in order to measure the participants’ self-regulation. Therefore, after collecting the data about the two above-mentioned variables, the researcher developed a general achievement test and gave it to the participants in order to measure the correlation between perfectionism, self-regulation, and the learners’ achievement. Finally, after collecting all data, the results were inserted into SPSS program and the correlation coefficient between the variables was measured.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

In the following sub-section, the related descriptive statistics regarding the different variables of the study are presented

4.1.1. Section one

A) Descriptive statistics related to the first Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) questionnaire are shown in the chart below. The questionnaire contains 45 questions; number 1 indicates the lowest and 7 the highest score (based on the lead spectrum). According to the chart, the highest score is related to the item *"Those around me readily accept that I can make mistakes too,* with the score of 5.48, and the lowest related to the item: *It does not matter to me when a close friend does not try their hardest,* with the obtained score of 4.47.

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale

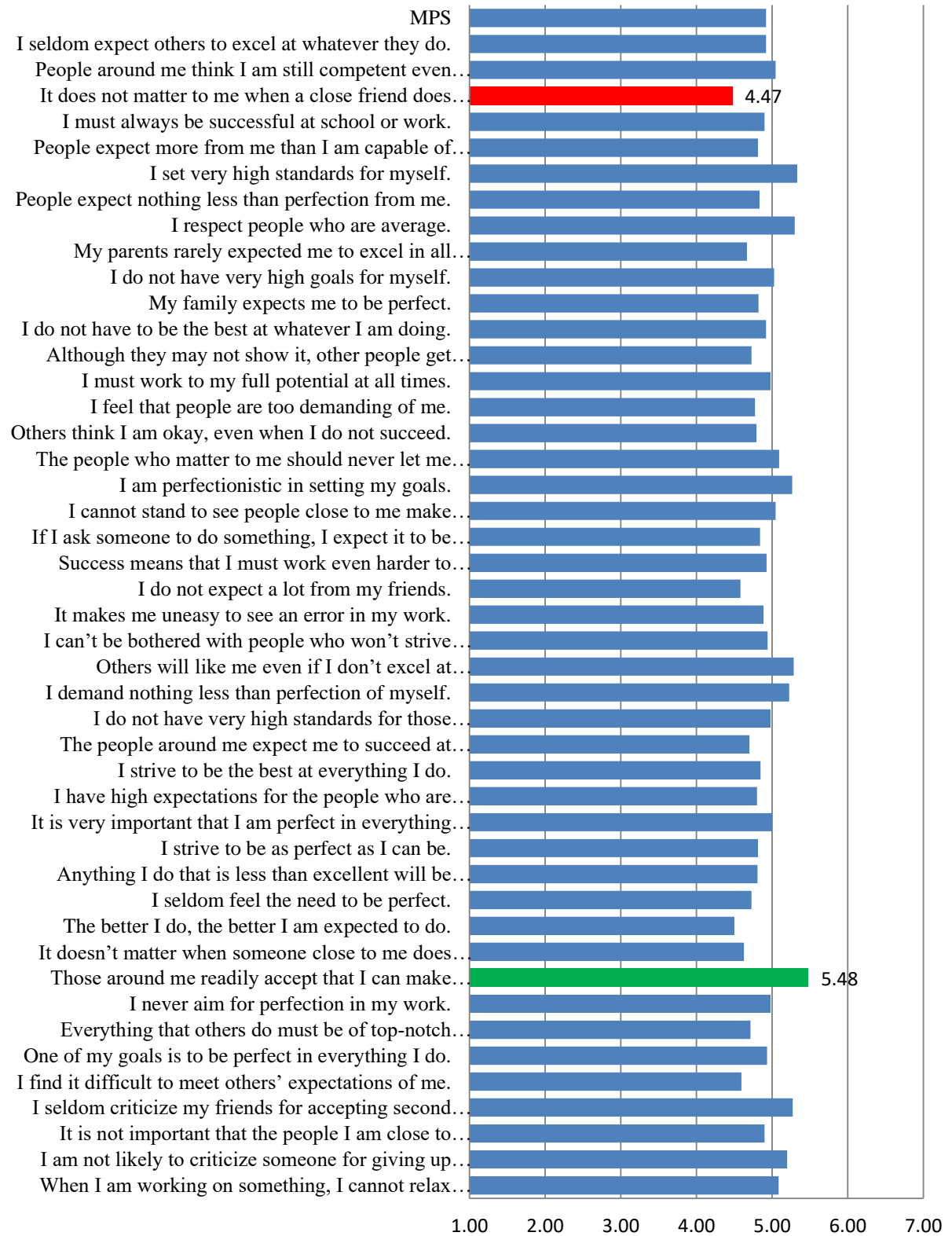


Figure 4.1. The score distribution for Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)

B) The descriptive statistics related to the second Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) are shown in the following diagram, which shows the lowest and 5 highest scores based on the Likert Scale 1 spectrum. Highest score for the item " *I reward myself for progress toward my goal*, with an average score of 4.21 and the lowest score which obtained through the item " *it bothers me when things aren't the way I want them* "with an average score of 3.17.

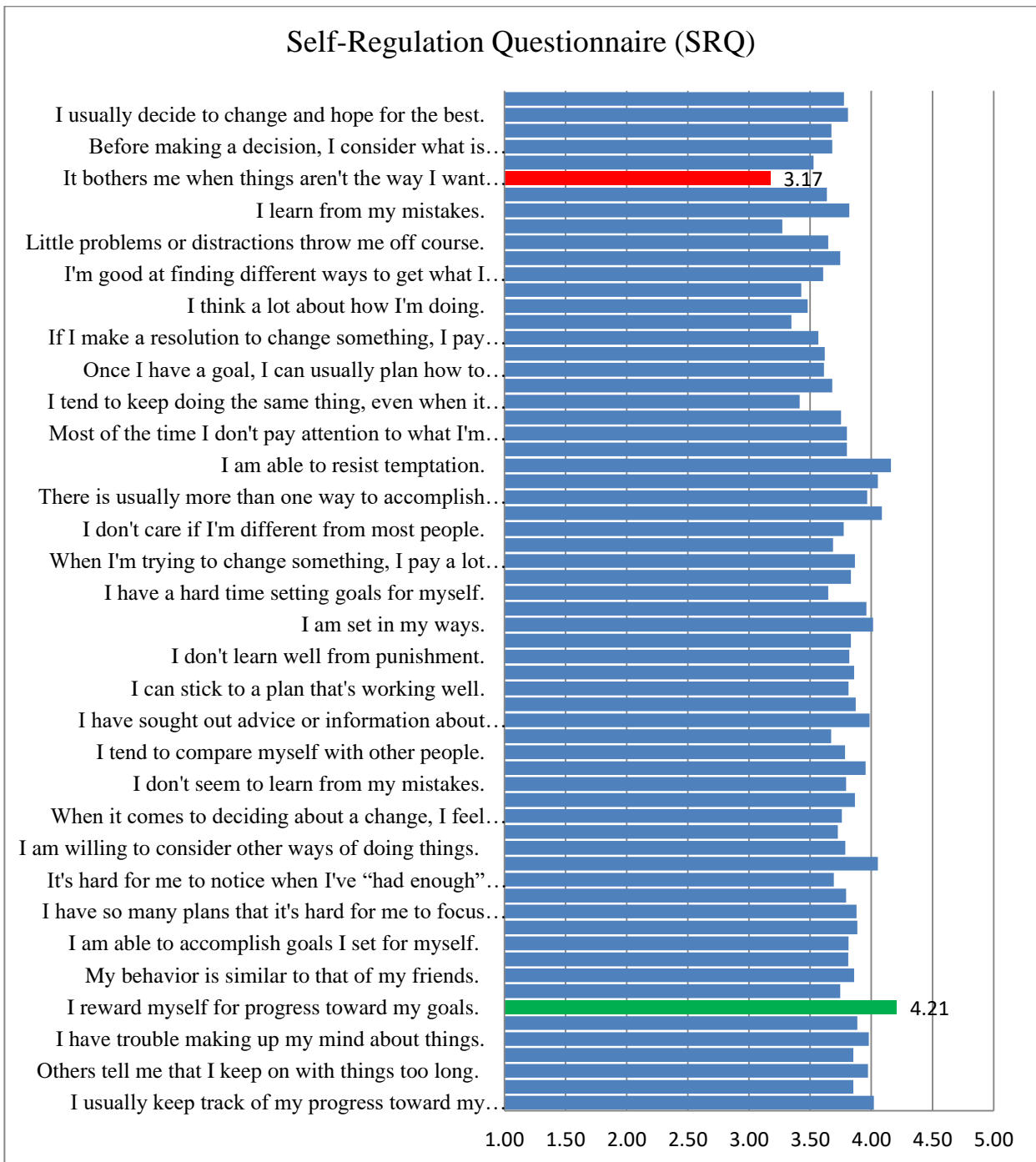


Figure 4.2. The score distribution for Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ)

C) The chart below shows the average Language Achievement scores of male and female students.

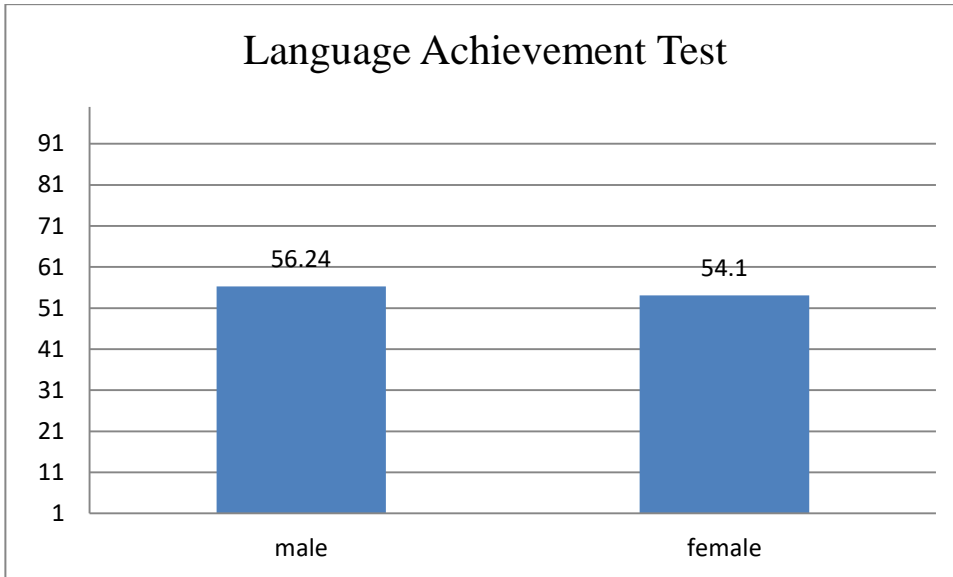


Figure 4.3. *The average Language Achievement scores of male and female students*

4.1.2. Section two

- a) The average score obtained in the first MPS questionnaire is equal to 4.915. T-test was used to evaluate the existence of normal distribution for Multidimensional Perfectionism among language learners. For this purpose, the hypothesis $\mu = 4$ is tested. According to the results of the table and statistics, P-Value = 0.000, the null hypothesis is rejected. $H_0: \mu = 4$ since $\mu - \mu_0 > 0$, therefore the hypothesis $\mu > 4$ is accepted. That is, the average score is significantly greater than 4, which indicates the existence of normal distribution for Multidimensional Perfectionism.

Table 4.1.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MPS	150	4.91	.57	.046

Table 4.2.
One-Sample Test

Test Value = 4						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
MPS	19.58	149	.000	.91	.82	1.00

The average score obtained in the SRQ questionnaire is equal to 3.76. T-test is used to check for normal distribution of self-regulation among language learners. For this purpose, the hypothesis $\mu = 3$ is tested. According to the results of the table and statistics, P-Value = 0.000, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since we have $H_0: \mu = 3$ $\mu - \mu_0 > 0$, the hypothesis $\mu > 3$ is accepted. That is, the average score is significantly greater than 3, which indicates the existence of normal distribution for Self-Regulation.

Table 4.3.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SRQ	150	3.76	.36	.029

Table 4.4.

One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
SRQ	25.91	149	.000	.76	.70	.82

The average score obtained in the Language Achievement section is equal to 6.175. T-test is used to assess students' LC scores. For this purpose, the hypothesis $\mu = 5.5$ is tested. According to the results of the table and statistics, P-Value = 0.000, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since we have $H_0: \mu = 50, \mu - \mu_0 > 0$, the hypothesis $\mu > 50$ is accepted. That is, the average score of language learners is significantly higher than the average (50).

Table 4.5

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language achievement	150	55.12	11.06	.90

Table 4.6

One-Sample Test

Test Value = 50						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Language achievement	5.67	149	.000	5.126	3.34	6.91

Independent Samples T-Test was used to evaluate the differences in MPS between male and female language learners. First, descriptive statistics are presented and then their equality of variance is examined.

Table 4.6

Group statistics

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MPS	male	72	4.89	.549	.06
	female	78	4.93	.595	.064

According to the information in the table above, the average RTQ for male students is 4.89 and for female students is 4.93. One of the hypotheses of the Independent T-Test is equality of variance, for which Levene's Test is used.

According to the test results, the confidence level is $\text{sig} = 0.642$, which is more than 0.05, and it can be accepted that the variances of the two groups are equal and the first row of the table is accepted. So there is no difference between the two groups. 5- Independent T-Test was used to evaluate the difference in SRQ between male and female students. First, descriptive statistics are presented and then their equality of variance is examined.

Table 4.7
Group Statistics

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SRQ	male	72	3.73	.38	.04
	female	78	3.79	.33	.03

According to the information in the table above, the average RTQ for male students is 3.73 and for female students is 3.79. One of the hypotheses of the Independent T-Test is equality of variance, for which Levene's Test is used.

Table 4.8.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ ence	Std. Error Differ ence	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper	
FLL AS	Equal varia nces assu med	.28	.59	-.88	148	.37	-.05	.05	-.14	.03
	Equal varia nces not assu med			-.88	140. 52	.380	-.05	.05	-.17	.065

According to the test results, the confidence level is $\text{sig} = 0.595$, which is more than 0.05, and it can be accepted that the variances of the two groups are equal and the first row of the table is accepted. So there is no difference between the two groups.

Independent T-Test was used to evaluate the difference in LA scores between male and female students. First, descriptive statistics are presented and then their equality of variance is examined.

Table 4.9.

Group Statistics

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language	male	72	56.23	10.34	1.21
achievement	female	78	54.10	11.65	1.319

According to the information in the table above, the average LC score for male students is 56.23 and for female students is 54.10. One of the hypotheses of the Independent T-Test is equality of variance, for which Levene's Test is used.

Table 4.9.

Independent Samples Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

								Lower	Upper	
RTQ	Equal variances assumed	1.55	.21	1.18	148	.23	2.15	1.85	-1.44	5.94
	Equal variances not assumed			1.18	147.84	.23	2.15	1.76	-1.41	500

According to the test results, the confidence level is $\text{sig} = 0.214$, which is more than 0.05, and it can be accepted that the variances of the two groups are equal and the first row of the table is accepted. Therefore, gender has no role in students' LC scores.

4.2. Inferential Statistics:

4.2.1. Test of normality

In order to implement statistical methods and calculate appropriate test statistics and logical inference about research hypotheses, the most important step before any action is to choose the appropriate statistical method for research. To this purpose, knowledge of data distribution is a top priority. The normality test of a distribution is one of the most common applications of the Distribution Matching Test, and the valid Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is suitable for this purpose. The statistical hypotheses of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test are as follows.

H₀: The data are normally distributed.

H₁: Data are not normally distributed.

Therefore, rejecting the statistical null hypothesis (H_0) means that the data are not normal and reject the null hypothesis if the significance level of the test is less than .050 (sig <0.05). According to the results of the table and since sig or P-Value is more than 0.05, we can accept the null hypothesis that the data distribution is normal.

Table 4.10.
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		MPS	SRQ	Language achievement
N		150	150	150
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	4.9154	3.7662	55.1267
	Std. Deviation	.57258	.36205	11.06375
	Most Extreme Differences			
	Absolute	.050	.069	.071
	Positive	.050	.043	.044
	Negative	-.044	-.069	-.071
Test Statistic		.050	.069	.071
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 ^{c,d}	.078 ^c	.059 ^c

- a. Test distribution is Normal.
- b. Calculated from data.
- c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.
- d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

According to the above table, the significance level of the test is equal to 0.248, which (Sig = 0.248 > 0.05) is greater than 0.05, and at the 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis (H_0) can be accepted. In other words, there is no significant relationship between learners' self-regulation and language achievement. C. Due to the normality of data distribution, Pearson parametric test is used to examine the relationship and correlation between learners' self-regulation and learners' perfectionism. In this test, rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0) means that there is a significant relationship between learners' self-regulation and learners' perfectionism, and accepting the null hypothesis means that there is no correlation between the variables. The table below is shown.

4.2.2. Hypothesis testing

This section examines the research hypotheses using the Pearson Correlation Analysis parametric test. Pearson correlation coefficient is an indicator that measures the relationship between two variables that have a normal distribution. The existence of a correlation between two variables does not necessarily mean the existence of a cause-and-effect relationship, but simply means that the changes of the two variables are in one direction (direct) or in the opposite direction (inverse). The maximum correlation coefficient is +1 and the minimum is -1. The closer the correlation coefficient (r) is to +1, there is a direct linear relationship and a strong correlation between the two variables, ie increasing one of the variables increases the other variable. Close to 1- means that there is an inverse and strong linear relationship between the two variables. Now if there is no linear relationship between the two variables, their correlation coefficient is zero. If the opposite is not the case. If the correlation coefficient is zero, it cannot be concluded that the two variables are independent of each other, but we can only say that there is no linear relationship between the two variables. Hypothesis zero is rejected if the significance level of the test is less than 0.05.

4.2.2.1. The first hypothesis analysis

The research hypotheses were as follows:

H01: There is no significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' perfectionism and their language learning?

H02: There no significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' self-regulation and their language learning.

H03: There is no significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' perfectionism and their self-regulation.

A) Due to the normality of data distribution, Pearson parametric test is used to examine the relationship and correlation between learners' perfectionism and language achievement. In this test, rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0) means that there is a significant relationship between learners' perfectionism and language achievement, and accepting the null hypothesis means that there is no correlation between the variables. The results of Pearson correlation test have been shown in the table below.

Table 4.11.

Correlations Between Language Achievements and MPS

		Language achievement	MPS
Language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.211**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
	N	150	150
MPS	Pearson Correlation	.211**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the above table, the significance level of the test is equal to 0.010, which (Sig = 0.010 < 0.05) is less than 0.05, and at the 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis (H_0) cannot be accepted. In other words, there is a significant relationship between learners' perfectionism and language achievement. Also, according to the correlation coefficient of 0.211, it can be said that it is positive and direct between the two.

B. Due to the normality of data distribution, Pearson parametric test is used to examine the relationship and correlation between learners' self-regulation and language achievement. In this test, rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0) means that there is a significant relationship

between learners' self-regulation and language achievement, and accepting the null hypothesis means that there is no correlation between the variables. The results of the Pearson correlation test are shown in the table below.

Table 4.12.

Correlations Between Language Achievements and SRQ

		Language achievement	SRQ
Language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.22
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.048
	N	150	150
SRQ	Pearson Correlation	.22	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.48	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the above table, the significance level of the test is equal to 0.048, which (Sig = 0.248 > 0.05) is lower than 0.05, and at the 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis (H₀) cannot be accepted. In other words, there is a significant relationship between learners' self-regulation and language achievement.

C. Due to the normality of data distribution, Pearson parametric test is used to examine the relationship and correlation between learners' self-regulation and learners' perfectionism. In this test, rejecting the null hypothesis (H₀) means that there is a significant relationship between learners' self-regulation and learners' perfectionism, and accepting the null hypothesis means that there is no correlation between the variables. The table below is shown.

Table 4.1

Correlations between SRQ and MPS

		MPS	SRQ
MPS	Pearson Correlation	1	.213**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	150	150
SRQ	Pearson Correlation	.213**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the above table, the significance level of the test is equal to 0.009, which (Sig = 0.009 < 0.05) is less than 0.05, and at the 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis (H₀) cannot be accepted. In other words, given the correlation coefficient of 0.213, there is a significant positive relationship between learners' self-regulation and learners' perfectionism.

6. Conclusion

This study provides several pedagogical implications. First of all, self-regulated based learning can improve students' language achievement. In fact, one of the most beneficial and significant implications in L2 learning context is that by documenting the findings of the current study, teachers are recommended to provide positive feedback by verbal messages and social persuasions to help learners to resort to extra activities in order to gain success. Likewise, as considering the perfectionist mindsets, high standards would create a kind of stressful and disappointing environment, students are suggested to replace unachievable standards with logical aims in L2 learning (Dashtizadeh & Farvardin, 2016). The findings of the current study may also open novel horizons and insights to administrators, course and syllabus designers and developers to program their planning more accurately and move toward a more efficient language learning syllabus and

prospective future for teachers who play a pivotal role in the language achievements of the learners.

Besides, the findings of the present study confirmed the positive role of perfectionism in L2 learning. Consistent with Locke and Latham (2006), setting challenging and attainable goal is one of the important criteria of personal development and properly setting objectives help students to sustain motivation and commitment to their success. Furthermore, it was revealed that perfectionism is directly related to self-regulation on the part of the learners.

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