An Investigation into Interrelations Between Trait Emotional Intelligence and Perfectionism in Middle School Aged Children

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Abstract: This research focuses on the detection of interrelations between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence in children of middle school age. The Frost multidimensional scale of perfectionism (F-MPS) for the detection of the perfectionism level was used. The global level of trait emotional intelligence was measured with the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire for children (TEIQue-CSF). The research sample consisted of 120 middle school children between 10 to 12 years old. The sample comprised of 80 girls and 40 boys. The results of the research failed to reveal any statistically significant relations between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, trait emotional intelligence, children in middle school age.*

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1 Introduction

Studies (Neumeister, 2004, Mendagli, 2007, In Drolet and col., 2014) dealing with perfectionism problematics in children consider perfectionism to be a negative construct, which hampers or limits them in the development of their own abilities and progress at school. A positive view in the problematics of perfectionism in children is the desire for excellent results at school or in their club activities (Silvermanová, 2007). According to Matthews et al (2007) the term emotional intelligence includes the competence of an individual that helps them to manage, identify and process various emotions they experience. At more proficient levels they therefore can recognize individual emotions of other people and feel empathy. There has been found to be a significantly important interrelation between perfectionism and the degree of trait emotional intelligence (Smith, Saklofske, Yan, 2015, Stoeber, Otto, 2006, in Smith, Saklofske, Yan, 2015). A positive relationship was found between individual dimensions of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence. On the basis of the findings, it can be confirmed that an individual with high perfectionist endeavours has a desire to be excellent and motivated to achieve their own performance and that they can regulate their own emotions well (Aldea, Rice, 2006, In Smith, Saklofske, Yan, 2015). Individuals that show a high level of perfectionist apprehensions, concern about making mistakes, are excessively self-criticising and very sensitive towards criticism from others. It can be hard for them to accept social support (Lahey, 2009, Smith, Saklofske, Nordstokke, 2014). This implies that people with high perfectionist apprehensions exhibit low trait emotional intelligence. Their apprehensions are increased by avoiding intimacy, procrastinating over important decisions and are likely to become excessively suspicious (Dunkley and col., 2012, Smith, Nordstokke, Saklofske, 2014).

K. V. Petrides, and A. Furnham (2001) confirmed that individuals with high levels of perfectionist apprehension showed signs of emotivity disorders and disorders of the ability to process, regulate and express emotions, which is characteristic for individuals with a higher degree of trait emotional intelligence (Smith, Nordstokke, Saklofske, 2014). In the general population perfectionism is accepted as a manifestation of activities that individuals perform in everyday life. There has also been found an inability to make decisions that may be manifested in decision making at important life stages. Emotionally intelligent individuals are able to regulate, share, distinguish emotions, make use of the knowledge of their own emotions in their thinking and behaviour and therefore this helps not only emotional

development but also intellectual growth. Contrary to this, emotionally intelligent individuals should not be detrimentally judged due to emotional intelligence being a predictor of successful social performance (Duran et al. 2006). It has been found that at the lower level of the emotional intelligence scale, respondents had a higher tendency towards perfectionism and vice versa, in that the emotionally higher scaled individuals were less inclined to be perfectionists. If emotionally intelligent individuals find themselves in a situation where the task is unattractive, difficult to manage and hard to complete, then they do not procrastinate, leaving the task till later, because they have the capacity to respond to possible obstacles and successfully overcome them (Deniz, Tras, Aydogan, 2009).

On basis of the research findings of Smith, Saklofsky, Yan, (2015) and Smith, Nordstokke, Yan, (2014), our research focused on the detection of interrelations between emotional intelligence and perfectionism. These interrelations have their application in the conception of innovative procedures in the education of pupils, who established themselves during the pandemic COVID 19. Based on these findings, it may be possible to eliminate shortcomings in e-learning. It may also be appropriate to link individual knowledge from distance education with the level of perfectionism and emotional intelligence.

Maladaptive forms of perfectionism can lead to student failure in postmodern society. Children tend to remain in a fictional reality, which can have consequences for social networking with their class peers. The overall level of emotional intelligence can be stimulated through digital communication to eliminate maladaptive perfectionism, which determines the onset of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Syndrome. Discovering the relationships between individual aspects of perfectionism can be used in creating new projects to stimulate the competencies required in a postmodern society.

Middle school age is a very important period in a person's life, this is when empathy develops along with a social construction of reality. Despite modern technologies that are currently being worked with, it may be necessary to learn how to use them in a person's life so that acquired skills can be well assimilated into future generations in the society of the future.

The primary aim of this study is to attempt to discover whether there are significantly substantial interrelations between:

- overall degrees of perfectionism and global degrees of trait emotional intelligence
- individual sub-scales of perfectionism and global degrees of trait one

In the first hypothesis we used the research findings of M. M. Smitha, D. H. Saklofskeho, G. Yana (2015) and M. M. Smitha, D. W. Nordstokkeho, G. Yana (2013); which aimed to detect individual interrelations between perfectionism and degree of trait emotional intelligence. In the research, it was confirmed that perfectionism and level of trait emotional intelligence are connected. On the basis of those findings, we formulated a hypothesis H1 in a following way:

H1: An assumption is made that there is a significantly important relationship between the degree of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence.

We formulated the following research question in order to be able to analyse the problematics in more detail.

RQ1: Is there a significantly important relationship between individual subscales of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence?

2. Method

2.1 Research Basis

The choice of participants in the research sample was done via deliberate choice. The sample consisted of Y5 and Y6 basic school students in Trnava, Trenčín and Piešťany. The chosen classes were general without specialisation in a specific subject. The number of respondents was 240, in which there were 160 girls and 80 boys. The age range was from 10 to 12 years, thus this identified them in the middle school age range.

Children in middle school age reach adequate emotional stability, their communication can be seen as generally adequate with the role of a student, classmate and friend being adopted well enough (Vágnerová, 2005). All children took part in the research (survey) on a voluntary basis and completed the questionnaire given in written form. Furthermore, after the parents had agreed to participate in the research, the required research information was provided to them. Participating children and their parents were informed about their role in the research, the aim, the conditions of the research and anonymity was guaranteed to all.

Respondents filled in questionnaires during the first lesson on Wednesday. The participants in our research sample were equalised in various ways, from the point of view of age, general specialization of the class, location of their permanent residency, socio-economic status, and family status. The respondents were comparable in terms of age, socio-economic status and degree level of their studies.

2.2 Research Time Schedule

Work began on the research study in September 2020. Questionnaires that were designed to collect data were provided to students who were willing to participate in the research and who met the conditions which had been established. Data collection took a period of two months in total. After collecting the data, it was processed statistically and evaluated subsequently.

Table No. 1: Research Schedule

Research Stages	September	October	November
Research organization	*		
Selection of methods and samples		*	
Goal formulation		*	
Data collection		*	*
Data processing			*
Evaluation			*

2.3 Research strategy and data collection

A quantitative method was chosen to conduct an analysis of the research. In addition, it can also be considered a verification research type. To obtain the data needed for our research a survey approach was adopted. Through the implementation of the survey, more data was collected in a relatively short time. The questionnaires used in the research were focused on exploring the issue of academic procrastination and emotional intelligence.

2.4 Materials and Equipment

This research is a verification-based research study along with a quantitative research approach. In the context of the research study, two questionnaires were used through which investigation of the rate of perfectionism and emotional intelligence in middle school age children was explored. Focus was directed at detection of interrelations between emotional intelligence and perfectionism. At the beginning of the

questionnaire a battery of questions about current demographic information such as gender, age, and grade were included.

Use was made of the **Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (F-MPS)** which consists of 35 items, that are marked on a 5-point Likert scale. Employing this scale, the overall degree of perfectionism in the respondents was identified, and values of individual sub-scales as well: also variables taken into consideration were concerns about making mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, criticism from parents, doubts about one's own actions with a subscale of variables being created. The reliability of F-MPS in the context of internal consistency was determined by Cronbach's Alpha, reaching the level $\alpha = 0,890$.

Trait emotional intelligence questionnaire (TEIQue-CSF) – shorter form for children: based on a self-evaluation by the respondents, the questionnaire aided identification of the emotional aspects of the personalities of children. Items found in a shortened form of this questionnaire arise from the full version TEIQue-CF. Researchers S. Mavroveli and K. V. Petrides (2001 in: Mavroveli,, Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, 2009) are the originating authors of this questionnaire. It is intended to be used with children aged 8-12 years. It consists of 36 items with a 5-degree scale of agreement-disagreement. The subsequent results present a score for global trait emotional intelligence. It was chosen to detect a global norm of respondents. The completion of the questionnaire took 10-15 minutes and was done in a group format.

2.5 Statistical data administration

The acquired data was processed by the statistical program IBM SPSS21. A Kolmogor/Smirn test was used to find the distribution of each individual variable in our research sample, because the number of the respondents did not exceed 50. Based on not confirming to the norm, non-parametric tests were utilised. Specifically, the non-parametric Spearman correlation was used to find individual connections between variables.

3 Results Analysis

After the normality was tested for each variable (perfectionism, trait emotional intelligence) a normal distribution was not found to be evident and thus non-parametric versions of the tests by individual hypothesis and research questions were implemented.

In the first hypothesis (H1) focus was directed towards the detection of the existence of interrelationships between perfectionism and global trait emotional intelligence.

H1: An assumption is made that there is a significantly important relationship between the degree of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence.

Chart 2: Connection between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence

PERFECTIONISM		TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
	r	0,012
	p	0,897
	N	120

r – correlation coefficient
p – significance
N - number

(Source: thesis author)

To determine any form of a relationship, the non-parametrical Spearman correlation analysis was employed. From the chart 1 the implication is that there is no significantly important relationship between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence ($r=0,012$; $p=0,897$). On basis of this finding, **hypothesis H1 is not accepted.**

For a more detailed exploration to determine the existence of individual connections, research question RQ,1 which was focused on identification of an assumed connection between individual sub-scales of perfectionism with global level of trait emotional intelligence was used.

RQ1: Is there a significantly important relationship between individual subscales of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence?

Chart 3: Connection between individual sub-scales of perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence.

PERFECTIONISM		TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
Concern about making mistakes	r	-0,27**
	p	0,008
Doubts about action	r	0,114
	p	0,214

Criticism from parents	r	0,099
	p	0,281
Personal standards	r	-0,070
	p	0,448
Organization	r	0,087
	p	0,347
Parental expectations	r	0,099
	p	0,281

***correlation is significant on 0,01 level*

(Source: thesis author)

r – correlation coefficient

p – significancy

In an attempt to discover any relationships Spearman correlation analysis was utilised. With reference to chart 2, it implies that a significantly important relationship exists with trait emotional intelligence only in the subscale of perfectionism, particularly with concern regarding mistakes ($r_{os.st} = -0,27$; $p_{zn.z.ch} = 0,008$). In the case of concern about mistakes in the framework of perfectionism a slightly negative relationship can be observed – the higher concern about mistakes the child has, the lower degree of trait emotional intelligence there is. On basis of statistical analysis, **the research question RQ1 was not confirmed.**

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of results

In the first hypothesis H1 and research question RQ1 research was focused on the connection between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence, where **it was assumed that there would be a significantly important relationship between perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence.** The H1 hypothesis was rejected. Between the variables, perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence no significant important interrelationship was confirmed. Both variables, perfectionism and trait emotional intelligence being defined as personality constructs, and personality features (Salbot, 2011, Stumpf, Parker, 1999). The multidimensionality of perfectionism itself is considered to be an important fact - its structure being quite complicated. Several differing factors during an individual's life (parental expectation and criticism, concern about mistakes etc.) and especially during the fragile period of childhood, with many demands impacting from the surrounding world environment, are impressed upon the child causing undue influence, resulting in the development of perfectionism (Greenspon, 2000, Flett, Hewit, 1990).

In perfectionism, when the child is solely focused on its own performance and its own gratification, in order to fulfil his personal goals and norms that it has set, it can experience dissatisfaction, anxiety or various other apprehensions. Emotional intelligence as a personality trait seems to be a meaningful individual personality construct, which allows the individual to orientate itself, and also includes acknowledging the emotions of others, recognizing, processing and regulating them (Petrides, Furnham, 2001). An individual with a high level of trait emotional intelligence has a more positive view on life as well as on the challenging everyday situations and circumstances. A high degree of perfectionism in an individual is orientated mainly towards their own success, on reaching their own goals, and satisfying themselves (Doktorová, Baranovská, 2019). An additional aspect is evident in the trait emotional intelligence as being specified as a personality trait that includes expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, recognition of emotions in oneself and other people, rather than simply being self focused. This characteristic of the trait is oriented mainly on the world around and situations connected to other individuals. Thus, perfectionism can be considered to determine our whole remit of feeling experience.

Emotionality, being greatly prominent, influences our whole personality, however due to working with respondents who had normal degrees of perfectionism (adaptive form of perfectionism) it was not possible to mark the relationship as being statistically significant (Doktorová, Piteková, 2020).

In the research question RQ1 focus was placed upon individual dimensions of perfectionism and their interrelation to the degree of trait emotional intelligence. A significantly important relationship was confirmed only between one sub-scale of perfectionism – concern about mistakes and trait emotional intelligence which corresponds to the research of J. Stoeber and K. Otto (2006, In Smith, Sklofske, Yan, 2015), who defined the perfectionist apprehensions to be exaggerated apprehensions that the individual may make some mistakes. During this time they can experience feelings of anxiety and fear. Furthermore, individuals with these perfectionistic apprehensions are shown to have low levels of trait emotional intelligence. This finding was also supported in research conducted by B. B. Lahey (2009, In Smith, Saklofske, Nordstokke, 2014), research suggests that an individual's concern about making mistakes and perfectionist apprehensions significantly mirror the reactions to emotional impetuses. Such individuals are overly self-critical and especially reactionary to criticism from people surrounding them. There is no motivation to accept social

support and help. According to K.V. Petrides and A. Furnham (2001) who also confirm an interrelation between concern about mistakes in perfectionists and trait emotional intelligence in their research. Perfectionists with this trait cannot sufficiently process and regulate their emotions and emotions of others. That leads to a creation of emotivity disorder and problems with expressing their feelings (In Smith, Nordstokke, Saklofske, 2013). As according to V. Salbot (2011) the degree of trait emotional intelligence increases with age, we can assume that if there were older children considered in this research sample base, then the relationship with perfectionism could show to a higher degree and in several other dimensions of perfectionism.

4.2 Research limits

Upon the completion of this research, several substantial limitations were noted, which were considered difficult to prevent during the actualization, which may have had a detrimental effect of the research findings. Certain characteristics of the research base sample will be the first to be considered.

Purposeful selection of the participants has been identified as one of the limitations. A random selection method was not performed, therefore research results for whole population cannot be expanded to the general population, because the assessed groups were chosen by us. In any future research it could be considered more appropriate to focus on a research sample that would consist of slightly older participants. The reasoning being it may lead to more significant result findings due to previous research findings highlighting the propensity of the trait emotional intelligence variable developing with age.

Working with the term maladaptive (dysfunctional) perfectionism on a 'healthy' population of children in middle school age can be considered a research flaw. Based on various research papers that considered the issue (Rice Aldea, (2006)., Rice, Ashby, 2007) it could be considered to be a gross mistake to study pathology amongst a non-pathological research sample base.

The self-descriptive method for measuring the level of trait emotional intelligence in children, the TEIQue-CSF in a shortened form, could also be a limiting factor. It may be more accurate to use a performance method, not a shortened form of given questionnaire, however that approach may be more demanding on time and processing.

Non-standardisation of the F-MPS questionnaire chosen, effects on our population sample: it could be suggested that there may have been

exhibited insufficient levels of motivation from our respondents, which could negatively influence the results of the research. To counter this, if every respondent were offered a reward, answering the questions may be more consistent. It is conjectured that the emotional state of the respondents at any given moment could lead to a distortion in the results.

4.3 Future objectives for research

The orientation of any future research study may be best focused towards older children, e.g., adolescents: the personality of adolescents can be normally characterized by a higher level of stability and tends to reach a culmination point as such, in comparison with younger children, which were the subject of study in our research sample base. Since the level of trait emotional intelligence changes with age, overall degree of perfectionism would apparently be fully manifested in an individual as they attain adolescence. Another option of future research focus could be the study of a sample of respondents who display maladaptive (dysfunctional) perfectionism. Perfectionism would be displayed as a certain degree of pathology, which is identified to greater or lesser levels and recognized in connection with suggested variables.

It could be suggested that a child prefers not to be viewed as different to its peer group and therefore they may fail to express their knowledge fully. Therefore, due to this attitude and behaviour they may not realise their potential. Procrastination, apprehension of failure, even academic failure can be an inherent display of perfectionism as a negative feature in children. On this basis, it may be a more suitable option to research interrelations between perfectionism and procrastination. To a high extent the social and psychological environment within families can influence management of perfectionism at school and acceptance of this construct by the child (Greenspon, 2000). In future research it could be suitable to focus on these aspects as well.

4.4 Impacts

Acquired knowledge could be applied in the field of educational psychology in basic schools, where teachers would be able to identify what behaviour acts as a most negative factor, resulting in an overall negative learning environment in the classroom, and thus then being able to intervene resulting in its subsequent elimination amongst the collective of pupils. Subsequent support of positive classroom coexistence between pupils can be established, thanks to various class activities and programs designed to develop positive classroom climate and strengthen social

relationships among pupils, can be imposed. Based on acquired knowledge of individual interrelations between variables, the school psychologist could apply activities and psychological programs into collectives, which in time could eliminate negative displays of maladaptive perfectionism in some individuals in the classroom and support development of an auspicious emotional atmosphere within classrooms.

In postmodern society clinical praxis knowledge of maladaptive forms of perfectionism, which are characterized by certain pathology, could be applied to eliminate problems with postmodern education. This knowledge of how and to what degree personality disorders and maladaptive perfectionism are connected results from careful scientific observation. Based on empirical research in the Counselling Psychology area, a case could be established that maladaptive perfectionists differ from children who have a lower level of perfectionism. A primarily focus on alleviating the impacts and influence of maladaptive forms of perfectionism on everyday life activities of a child both in family and at school could achieve a positive realistic conclusion.

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