

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers. The explanatory sequential design was used. In the quantitative study, a total of 350 student teachers (116 males and 234 females) from three teacher education institutions was selected by using stratified sampling technique. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b, 2004) and PGI Health Questionnaire N-1 (Verma, Wig, & Pershad, 1985) were used. Regarding perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionism was the highest in all three subscales of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. Finding indicated that 12% of student teachers had high level of perfectionism. The result of independent samples *t*-test revealed that there was significant gender difference in other-oriented perfectionism. ANOVA results indicated that there were significant teacher education institution differences in other-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism and total perfectionism. Regarding psychological distress, 17.4% of student teachers were elevated in psychological distress. Findings indicated that there were significant gender and teacher education institution differences in psychological distress. Moreover, the results indicated that there was a positive correlation between perfectionism and psychological distress. Furthermore, socially prescribed perfectionism was positively correlated with psychological distress. Finally, a qualitative follow up study was conducted by semi-structured interview. The interview results indicated that student teachers with high level of perfectionism were found to be associated with high level of psychological distress. The results of this study offered important implications for counselling with perfectionists that have high level of psychological distress.

Keywords: Perfectionism, Psychological Distress, Student Teachers

Introduction

Conventionally, individuals try to express their capabilities, potentials and talents to the fullest extent possible, and everyone wants to pass a successful journey throughout life without having a failure in everything. This causes one to set idealistic goals and try continuously towards the attainment of these goals. If one can't live to fail to meet these goals or hopes for the best at everything too much, this situation can trigger perfectionism.

Previous studies suggested that teachers have perfectionism problems in entering teaching profession. Teachers want to possess the perfect situation not only in their work but also in their personal life (Thompson, 2018). Hence, they have a great deal of pressure to live with their unrealistic expectations. These circumstances may cause the problem in which perfectionism has been associated with higher levels of stress and burnout in teaching profession which can be found in a study of in-service teachers in Myanmar (May Nandar Hlaing & Su Thiri Maung, 2020).

Since perfectionism problems are widely spread out in teaching profession, it has become an interesting case to find out whether or not perfectionism problems come out and relate to psychological distress among student teachers. If the protective activities can control their perfectionism traits to be adaptive level, student teachers can reduce stress levels and burnout when entering teaching profession. Further, perfectionistic demands play a distinct role with

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regard to perfectionistic concerns and perfectionistic efforts in student teachers (Aparicio-Flores et al., 2020), and higher levels of perfectionism are linked to intrusive mental images, high level of distress, and ruminant (Lee et al., 2011).

However, there is little research to find out perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers during the training period of teacher education institutions. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers in Myanmar.

Purposes of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate perfectionism of student teachers
2. To compare student teachers' perfectionism based on gender and teacher education institutions
3. To examine student teachers' psychological distress
4. To assess student teachers' psychological distress based on gender and teacher education institutions
5. To explore the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers

Definitions of Key Terms

Perfectionism. Perfectionism is a personality characteristic, which is defined as “striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations” (Stoeber, 2011, p. 128).

Psychological distress. Psychological distress is a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood and it is assessed by many putative measures of depression and anxiety (VandenBos, 2015).

Student teacher. Student teacher is operationally defined as a student who is doing pre-service training in teaching (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003).

Review of Related Literature

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is typically defined into three camps: perfectionism as a unitary construct, as a dual construct, or as a multidimensional construct. Contemporary researchers have adopted a multidimensional construct in which both positive and negative aspects are incorporated. Hewitt and Flett (1991a) provided a multidimensional model of perfectionism which differentiates three dimensions of perfectionism: self-oriented, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism.

Self-oriented perfectionism is a trait dimension focused on exceptionally high personal standards and the excessive striving to attain these standards. Other-oriented perfectionism is a trait dimension that involves the requirement that other people be perfect and hold unrealistic beliefs and expectations on others. Socially prescribed perfectionism is a trait dimension that involves the belief that significant others have overly high expectations for one's performance and pressure one to be perfect.

Psychological Distress

The word “distress” was originated from the root word stress, first distinguished by Selye (1974) into eustress and distress. Eustress is a good stress which provides a feeling of fulfillment or positive feeling. Distress is a bad stress in which individuals' coping abilities begin to

breakdown. The use of distress as a psychological phenomenon is frequently discussed in nursing, medical, psychological and social science literature (Masseé, 2000).

Pearlin's theory of psychological distress suggested that the individual's characteristics (i.e., gender, races, culture, intelligence, background, personality, and education) predicts a person's stability (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). Since perfectionism is a personality characteristic of the individual, it is regarded that there might be the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress.

Method

This study sought to find out the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers. Both quantitative and qualitative perspectives were used. To be specific, explanatory sequential design was used in this study. Among the types of survey studies, cross-sectional survey was used. Student teachers' perfectionism and psychological distress were examined by using questionnaire survey method.

Moreover, a follow up program of the semi-structured interview was conducted to provide further inside into the importance of the proposed perfectionism for psychological distress in this study. This study began with a quantitative approach as a primary method, then a qualitative follow up study was conducted to ensure in interpreting the quantitative results.

Participants of Quantitative Study

By using stratified sampling technique, a total of 350 student teachers ($M_{age} = 20.27$, $SD_{age} = 1.34$, 18-22 years old, 66.9% female) from three teacher education institutions in Myanmar was selected as participants of quantitative study. The characteristics of the chosen number of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Characteristics of Participants for Quantitative Study

Region/State	Teacher Education Institutions	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Yangon Region	University of Education 1	49	79	128
Bago Region	Education Degree College 1	37	69	106
Mon State	Education Degree College 2	30	86	116
	Total	116	234	350

Measures

Perfectionism. To assess student teachers' perfectionism, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b, 2004) was used. This measure consists of 45 items with three 15-item subscales: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. Each item was assessed along a 7-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha value in this study was 0.75.

Psychological distress. Psychological distress was examined by the PGI Health Questionnaire N-1 (PGIHQN-1; Verma, Wig, & Pershad, 1985). This measure consists of 38 items and the response type of each item was Yes/No type question. The Cronbach's alpha value in this study was 0.83.

Instrumentation and Procedure

All the measures used in this study were adapted to Myanmar language version. Then, expert review was conducted for face validity and content validity of the instruments by seven experts in the field of educational psychology and educational test and measurement from

Yangon University of Education. Next, the questionnaires were modified according to their suggestions and recommendations. And then, a pilot study was conducted to test whether the wording of items, statements and instructions had their clarity in Myanmar language version and were appropriate to student teachers. The Cronbach's alphas for all the measures in the pilot study were above 0.7, hence having satisfactory reliability. The researcher requested the respondents via telephone to participate in the questionnaire response voluntarily with informed consent.

Results of Quantitative Study

Student Teachers' Perfectionism

By comparing descriptive statistics for subscales of perfectionism, the mean score of self-oriented perfectionism was the highest (see Table 2).

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of Student Teachers' Perfectionism

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Self-oriented Perfectionism	350	77.22	10.68	39	103
Other-oriented Perfectionism	350	57.53	7.77	30	85
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	350	64.45	7.46	41	88
Total Perfectionism	350	199.19	18.47	112	254

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

Perfectionism Level of Student Teachers

Based on descriptive statistics of total perfectionism, student teachers were identified into three groups: 12% of student teachers with scores one standard deviation above the sample mean were considered as high group; 76.3% of student teachers with scores between (+1) and (-1) standard deviation from the sample mean were grouped into moderate group; and the remaining student teachers of 11.7% who scored one standard deviation lower than the sample mean were identified as low group (see Figure 1).

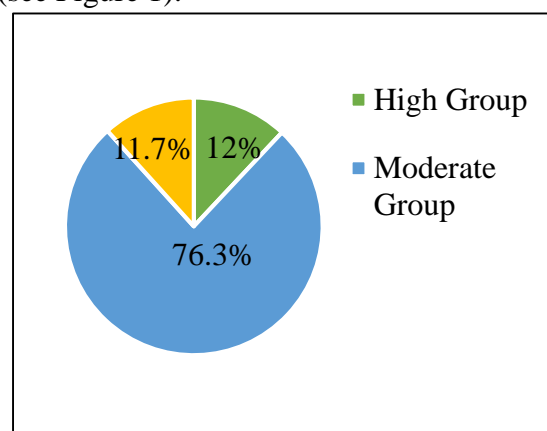


Figure 1 Three Different Groups of Student Teachers' Total Perfectionism

Comparison of Student Teachers' Perfectionism by Gender

To find out whether there were gender differences in perfectionism of student teachers, descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-test was conducted (see Table 3).

Table 3 Means, Standard Deviations and Results of Independent Samples *t*-test of Student Teachers’ Perfectionism by Gender

Variable	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-oriented Perfectionism	Male	116	76.32	11.21	-1.108	348	.269
	Female	234	77.66	10.40			
Other-oriented Perfectionism	Male	116	58.71	6.60	2.165*	279.179	.031
	Female	234	56.94	8.24			
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	Male	116	64.72	7.39	0.486	348	.627
	Female	234	64.31	7.51			
Total Perfectionism	Male	116	199.75	17.67	0.398	348	.691
	Female	234	198.91	18.88			

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The result of independent samples *t*-test stated that the mean score of other-oriented perfectionism for male student teachers was significantly higher than that of female student teachers, $t(279.179) = 2.165, p = .031$.

Comparison of Student Teachers’ Perfectionism by Teacher Education Institutions

To make more detailed information on the difference of student teachers’ perfectionism by teacher education institutions, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted (see Table 4).

Table 4 Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results of Student Teachers’ Perfectionism by Teacher Education Institutions

Variable	Teacher Education Institutions	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-oriented Perfectionism	UOE 1	128	77.59	12.07	0.178	.837
	EDC 1	106	77.25	9.93		
	EDC 2	116	76.78	9.75		
Other-oriented Perfectionism	UOE 1	128	55	7.95	11.286****	.000
	EDC 1	106	58.95	7.26		
	EDC 2	116	59.01	7.36		
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	UOE 1	128	63.03	8.41	4.247*	.015
	EDC 1	106	64.73	7.42		
	EDC 2	116	65.76	6.06		
Total Perfectionism	UOE 1	128	195.63	21.01	3.857*	.022
	EDC 1	106	200.92	17.90		
	EDC 2	116	201.54	15.25		

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**** The mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

M = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, UOE 1 = University of Education 1, EDC 1 = Education Degree College 1, EDC 2 = Education Degree College 2

ANOVA results indicated that there were significant differences of other-oriented perfectionism, $F(2, 347) = 11.286, p < .001$, socially prescribed perfectionism, $F(2, 347) = 4.247, p = .015$, and total perfectionism, $F(2, 347) = 3.857, p = .022$, with respect to teacher education institutions.

To obtain more detailed information for teacher education institutions, post hoc test was carried out by Tukey HSD multiple comparison procedure for UOE 1, EDC 1 and EDC 2 (see Table 5).

Table 5 Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Student Teachers' Perfectionism by Teacher Education Institutions

Categories	(I) Teacher Education Institution	(J) Teacher Education Institution	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Other-oriented Perfectionism	UOE 1	EDC 1	-3.953***	.000
		EDC 2	-4.009***	.000
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	EDC 2	UOE 1	2.727*	.012
Total Perfectionism	EDC 2	UOE 1	5.918*	.033

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*** The mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

According to Table 5, Tukey HSD test found that the mean scores of student teachers from EDC 1 and EDC 2 were significantly higher in other-oriented perfectionism than that of student teachers from UOE 1, whereas the mean scores of student teachers from EDC 2 were significantly higher in socially prescribed perfectionism and total perfectionism than that of student teachers from UOE 1.

Psychological Distress Level of Student Teachers

The mean and standard deviation of student teachers' psychological distress were 17.41 and 6.39. Based on descriptive statistics of psychological distress, student teachers were classified into three groups: high group (17.4%), moderate group (64.9%) and low group (17.7%) of psychological distress (see Figure 2).

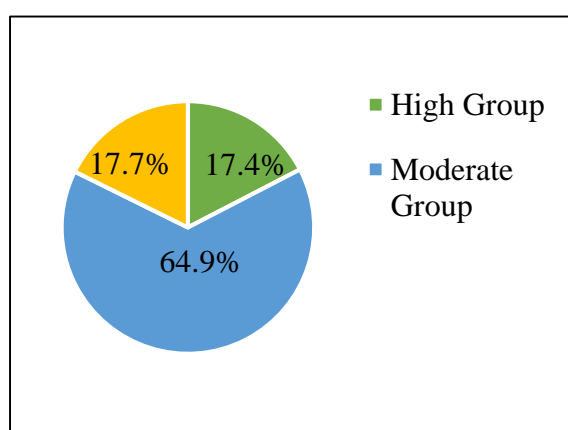


Figure 2 Three Different Groups of Student Teachers' Psychological Distress

Comparison of Student Teachers' Psychological Distress by Gender

To find out whether there was gender difference in psychological distress of student teachers, descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-test was conducted (see Table 6).

Table 6 Means, Standard Deviations, and Result of Independent Samples *t*-test of Student Teachers' Psychological Distress by Gender

Variable	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
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Psychological Distress	Male	116	16.13	6.73	-2.652**	348	.008
	Female	234	18.04	6.14			

Note. ** The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

The result of independent samples *t*-test stated that the mean score of psychological distress for female student teachers was significantly higher than that for male student teachers, $t(348) = -2.652, p = .008$.

Comparison of Student Teachers’ Psychological Distress by Teacher Education Institutions

To make more detailed information on the difference of student teachers’ psychological distress by teacher education institutions, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

ANOVA result indicated that there was significant difference for psychological distress, $F(2, 347) = 4.262, p = .015$, with respect to teacher education institutions (see Table 7).

Table 7 Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Result of Student Teachers’ Psychological Distress by Teacher Education Institutions

Variable	Teacher Education Institutions	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Psychological Distress	UOE 1	128	16.93	6.27	4.262*	.015
	EDC 1	106	16.47	6.46		
	EDC 2	116	18.78	6.30		

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

M = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, UOE 1 = University of Education 1, EDC 1 = Education Degree College 1, EDC 2 = Education Degree College 2

To obtain more detailed information for teacher education institutions, post hoc test was carried out by Tukey HSD multiple comparison procedure for UOE 1, EDC 1 and EDC 2 (see Table 8).

Table 8 Result of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Student Teachers’ Psychological Distress by Teacher Education Institutions

Variable	(I) Teacher Education Institution	(J) Teacher Education Institution	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Psychological Distress	EDC 2	EDC 1	2.313*	.019

Note. * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to Table 7, Tukey HSD test found that the mean score of student teachers from EDC 2 was significantly higher in psychological distress than that of student teachers from EDC 1.

Relationship Between Perfectionism and Psychological Distress

The correlations between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers are presented in Table 9. The results indicated that perfectionism was positively correlated with psychological distress. It could be said that the higher perfectionism, the higher psychological distress. In addition, socially prescribed perfectionism was positively correlated with

psychological distress. This indicates that student teachers who possessed socially prescribed perfectionism were likely to have high psychological distress (see Table 9).

Table 9 Relationship Between Perfectionism and Psychological Distress

	Self-oriented Perfectionism	Other-oriented Perfectionism	Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	Total Perfectionism	Psychological Distress
Self-oriented Perfectionism	1	.357**	.205**	.812**	.000
Other-oriented Perfectionism		1	.163**	.693**	.007
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism			1	.591**	.274**
Total Perfectionism				1	.114*
Psychological Distress					1

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Qualitative Study

A follow up program of the semi-structured interview was conducted to provide a more complete picture of the student teachers' psychological distress in the role of perfectionism.

Participants of Qualitative Study

The four groups such as low perfectionism and low psychological distress group, low perfectionism and high psychological distress group, high perfectionism and low psychological distress group, and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group were identified based on the results of quantitative data analyses, using the levels of perfectionism associating with the levels of psychological distress.

In the quantitative study, there were 10 student teachers in low perfectionism and low psychological distress group whereas there were 8 student teachers in low perfectionism and high psychological distress group. In high perfectionism and low psychological distress group, there were 2 student teachers while there were 7 student teachers in high perfectionism and high psychological distress group. Therefore, a total of 27 student teachers were selected as participants of qualitative study. The characteristics of student teachers for qualitative study are presented in Table 10.

Table 10 Characteristics of Student Teachers for Qualitative Study

	Psychological Distress Levels	Total
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		Low Psychological Distress	High Psychological Distress	
Perfectionism Levels	Low Perfectionism	10	8	18
	High Perfectionism	2	7	9
Total		12	15	27

Interview Guide and Procedure

the interview guide contained 10 core questions constructed with six factors: perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, psychological distress, and the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. Interviews were conducted via telephone. The researcher requested the respondents to participate in the interview response voluntarily with informed consent.

Results of Semi-Structured Interview

The participants’ responses to interview questions in each factor are as follows.

Perfectionism

Interview question 1 asked the participants if they think of themselves as perfectionists. The responses were categorized into *yes*, *no* and *other*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 66.7% of student teachers referred to *no*. It can be said that student teachers from low perfectionism groups usually referred to themselves as non-perfectionists. In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), all student teachers referred to themselves as perfectionists. It could be concluded that self-defining as a perfectionist was consistent with the levels of perfectionism.

Interview question 2 asked the participants to evaluate their own perfectionism to be positive or negative and why they thought of themselves about it. The responses were categorized into *positive aspect*, *negative aspect*, *positive and negative aspects* and *other*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 61.1% of student teachers agreed *positive aspect*. However, their reasons for positive aspect were focused only on the desire to be perfect. In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 88.9% of student teachers agreed *positive aspect* and their reasons were focused on their efforts to be perfect and the outcomes of striving for perfection (e.g., improving self-reliance, creating more favourable situations for the self, the family and the environment, etc.).

Self-oriented Perfectionism

Interview question 3 asked the participants if they feel satisfied or happy with their performance and why this might be. The response categories were *yes* and *no*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 83.3% of student teachers referred to *yes* and their reasons targeted on the idea of they trusted their ability to perform well and accepted the results what they pay for their performance. In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism

and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 88.9% of student teachers referred to *yes* and their reasons indicated that they actually strived for excellence and valued their perfectionistic tendencies. Consequently, they feel happy and satisfied with the results of what they really did.

Interview question 4 asked the participants how they feel when they think they have achieved less than their desired standard of performance. The responses categories were *need more effort*, *emotional impact*, *emotional impact and need more effort*, and *don't feel anything*. In all four groups, student teachers experiencing *emotional impact* (63%) were more percentage than other categories. Student teachers from low perfectionism and low psychological distress group experienced a little *emotional impact*. If they achieved less than the desired performance, they did not keep it in mind and accepted their results. However, student teachers from low perfectionism and high psychological distress group had too much feelings of *emotional impact*. Some student teachers responded their emotions by the use of depression, disappointed, discouraged that lead to high level of distress.

Moreover, student teachers from high perfectionism and low psychological distress group experienced a little *emotional impact* and they have some positive views on the unexpected something. They decided that they have to work harder now and keep trying to be the best next situation because of high level of perfectionism. However, student teachers from high perfectionism and high psychological distress group showed a considerable amount of *emotional impact* at unsuccessful something. They had a decidedly internal attributional style (e.g., self-blame, self-criticism) when they failed to accomplish a goal.

Other-oriented Perfectionism

Interview question 5 asked the participants to describe how being a perfectionist influence on all areas of their lives, such as personal, social, academic and peer relationships, etc. The response categories were classified by *positive effect*, *negative effect*, *no effect* and *other*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 61.1% of student teachers referred to *positive effect* and their reasons were responded the same ideas about they can live well in these areas. Some student teachers expressed *negative effect*, pointed out that they lost their freedom when significant others impose perfectionistic demands on them.

In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), all student teachers referred to *positive effect*. Their reasons were focused on the advantages of perfectionism such as achieving the positive result in social dimensions, receiving well accomplishment, getting the respect and trust of others, the others rely upon him/her, etc.

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

Interview question 6 asked the participants if other people have referred to them as perfectionists. The respondents' categories were *yes*, *no*, *sometimes referred*, *sometimes not referred*, *undecided* and *not sure*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 83.3% of student teachers referred to *no*. In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 66.7% of student teachers said that other people have referred to them as perfectionists. It can be

said that they were also obviously recognized that who is perfectionist or non-perfectionist in the social environment.

Interview question 7 asked the participants if they have been motivated to complete a task or project flawlessly by avoiding error and negative feedback and why this might be. The response categories were *yes*, *no* and *other*. In low perfectionism groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and low perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 66.7% of student teachers referred to *yes* but they showed a sense of when they want to do it enthusiastically, they do it and when they don't want to do it, they never do it. In high perfectionism groups (high perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), all student teachers absolutely indicated that they actually avoided error and negative feedback with the sense of they were to be the best in performing a task or project.

Psychological Distress

Interview question 8 asked the participants to describe the main stressors of being a student teacher. The responses were categorized into *professional stressor*, *environmental stressor*, *relationship stressor*, *personal stressor*, *academic stressor* and *no stressor*. All student teachers referred to various stressors about being a student teacher. Among the various stressors, the agreement of *academic stressor* (33.3%) was more percentage than the other stressors. Comparing the percentage of various stressors among teacher education institutions in high psychological distress groups (low perfectionism and high psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), it was found that UOE 1 (26.7%), EDC 1 (33.3%), and EDC 2 (40%). It could be interpreted that student teachers from EDC 2 experienced more stressors among teacher education institutions.

Interview question 9 asked the participants to express the number of times experiencing distress per week and how distress influence on their daily lives. The responses were *sometimes*, *none* and *a large amount*. In low psychological distress groups (low perfectionism and low psychological distress group and high perfectionism and low psychological distress group), 66.7% of student teachers referred to *sometimes*. Some student teachers knew how to cope dealing with stress (e.g., reading a motivation book, ignoring some unpleasant stress, etc.). In high psychological distress groups (low perfectionism and high psychological distress group and high perfectionism and high psychological distress group), 73.3% of student teachers referred to *a large amount of distress*. Specifically, high perfectionism and high psychological distress group indicated a massive amount of distress with symptoms of depression and anxiety such as loss of appetite, trouble in sleeping, loss of desire to work and talk, etc. (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003).

The Relationship Between Perfectionism and Psychological Distress

Interview question 10 asked participants if they consider there is a relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress and how much distress cause them about being a perfectionist. All 27 student teachers considered being a perfectionist to be a source of at least some distress. In low perfectionism and low psychological distress group, student teachers didn't strive to be perfect, and even the other persons pushed them seriously to do it, they won't do it except they blamed others with the description of losing their freedom.

In low perfectionism and high psychological distress group, they didn't try to be perfect, but they were more likely to be distress related with something. One participant said that being a perfectionist was distressing and another participant said that it makes her feel uncomfortable. In

high perfectionism and low psychological distress group, they accepted that they were perfectionists, but they didn't feel high level of distress if something they do was not convenient. In high perfectionism and high psychological distress group, there was large effect of perfectionism on psychological distress in their daily lives. One participant could not relax until it is a perfect position and one participant said that being a perfectionist must work harder to feel validated and accepted by the other, which in turn leads to loss of freedom.

Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress of student teachers. The finding indicated that self-oriented perfectionism was the highest in all three subscales of perfectionism. This result was consistent with the previous study of in-service teachers in Myanmar (May Nandar Hlaing & Su Thiri Maung, 2020). This may be due to the fact that student teachers are teachers of the future, so they have motivated themselves dealing with teaching profession in which a teacher must strive to be the best in all aspects. According to the results of interview question 3 related with self-oriented perfectionism, 85.2% of student teachers in the four groups could try to attain their standards and feel satisfied with their performance. Hence, supporting the results of quantitative study, self-oriented perfectionism was the highest among all subscales of perfectionism.

Regarding gender, male student teachers were higher in other-oriented perfectionism than female student teachers. This result was congruent with the previous studies of university students conducted by Cowie et al. (2018). This may be due to the fact that males are given opportunities to fail, fight, drop the loss and look to the next opportunity to win, which are more consistent with a protector and provider role (Dobson, 2020). These socially determined gender norms placed high standards on males. According to the social learning model of perfectionism, perfectionism can be learned by observing and imitating perfectionist models (Flett et al., 2002). As a result, male student teachers may observe and imitate the social expectations of significant perfectionists' models and then they were more likely to impose more stringent expectations for others.

Regarding teacher education institutions, student teachers from EDC 1 and EDC 2 were higher in other-oriented perfectionism than those from UOE 1. This might be due to the fact that student teachers from education degree colleges were usually started to feel pressure from academic rigor, and there were still future goals for attending university of education to be achieved, so they needed to try to complete their progress within the competitive environment. In addition, they might experience greater concern of activities and teamwork with an emphasis on maintaining harmony and interdependence among education degree college student teachers. Hence, they need to strive for the best performance on their self and their self-strivings may have an impact on the others' strivings to be perfect within the activities and teamwork.

Further, student teachers from EDC 2 were higher in socially prescribed perfectionism and total perfectionism than those from UOE 1. This finding was consistent with the previous studies of Hibbard and Davies (2011) in which different educational contexts manifested different dimensions of perfectionism. It could be said that perfectionism may vary on training effect and nature of teacher education institutions. Student teachers from university of education did not struggle with too many restrictions compared to those from education degree colleges. However, student teachers from EDC 2 were more striving to be convenient in social concerns and they may have to express their progress to maintain the dignity and reputation of their education degree college as compared to other education degree colleges. Hence, the high-

pressure educational institutions may breed perfectionism where students must be perfect to meet high standards and to attain social norms of these institutions (Hibbard & Davies, 2011). The result of this study could give special knowledge for counselors and educators to facilitate adaptive perfectionism in education degree colleges. When it is adaptive, perfectionism is related with higher self-esteem, resourcefulness, and achievement motivation (Reser, 2016).

Regarding psychological distress, female student teachers were higher in psychological distress than male student teachers. This finding was congruent to the previous studies of college students (Graves et al., 2021). It could be possible because females are more likely to internalize emotions, which typically results in withdrawal, loneliness, and depression, while males are more likely to externalize emotions, leading to aggressive, coercive and noncompliant behavior when facing the stressful situation in daily life (Eaton, 2011). According to the results of qualitative study, in high psychological distress groups, 93.3% of student teachers were females and indicated high level of distress. Hence, supporting the results of quantitative study, female student teachers were higher in psychological distress than male student teachers.

In addition, student teachers from EDC 2 were higher in psychological distress than those from EDC 1. The result was consistent with the previous studies of student teachers in Myanmar (e.g., Nu Nu Nyunt & May Kyi Soe, 2014). All of these findings were possible and reasonable in that student teachers from education degree colleges were challenged with the training effect of having to keep up with the high demands required to thrive in their college environment and to continue their progress in the university environment. To meet these demands, they must be able to perform under pressure. Further, education degree college environments were mostly organized with fixed time and more restriction than university environments. Because of these situations, only student teachers from education degree colleges had high level of distress as compared with those from university of education.

Since student teachers from EDC 2 have high level of perfectionism, they might struggle for the high-pressured lifestyles than student teachers from EDC 1 which lead to higher distress levels. In addition, social norms of the locality regarding perfectionism had an impact on training programs of education degree colleges. The locality of student teachers from EDC 2 is the urban lifestyle so social expectations can be higher and may focus on achievement-oriented endeavors which make student teachers from EDC 2 may feel more distress. Even the training programs of education degree colleges were based on the same tasks, the social environments were not the same in demanding high level of achievement. According to the interview results of comparing various stressors among teacher education institutions in high psychological distress groups, 26.7% of student teachers were from UOE 1, 33.3% of student teachers were from EDC 1, and 40% of student teachers were from EDC 2. Hence, supporting the results of quantitative study, student teachers from EDC 2 experienced more stress than student teachers from EDC 1.

Next, student teachers' perfectionism was positively correlated with psychological distress. This finding could give a special contribution to teacher education institutions to understand the importance of perfectionism and it affects psychological states. Counselors and educators have to facilitate adaptive perfectionism in teacher education institutions because perfectionistic attitudes are beneficial for individual strivings to achieve the best performance in performance-oriented society of 21st century. In addition, there was a positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and psychological distress. This finding was congruent with the previous studies of university students (Short, 2012). It might be due to the cultural effect of perfectionism because the individuals take into account the feeling of how others see and feel to them rather than the feelings of self-satisfaction and happiness to the outcomes of

their performance in Myanmar. Moreover, individuals from collectivistic society (Eastern culture) are more likely to maintain socially prescribed perfectionism than those from individualistic society (Western culture) (Chow, 2002).

Hence, a follow up program of semi-structured interview allowed for investigating consistencies in student teachers' perfectionism and psychological distress. According to the results of interview question 7 related with socially prescribed perfectionism, 77.7% of student teachers in the four groups tried to be perfect in social aspects because they avoided error and negative feedback in performing a task or project. There was an impact of socially prescribed perfection on both low perfectionism and high perfectionism groups.

According to the findings of the interview, student teachers with high level of perfectionism were found to be associated with high level of psychological distress. Specifically, 20% of student teachers from low perfectionism and low psychological distress group, 25% of student teachers from low perfectionism and high psychological distress group and 14.3% of student teachers from high perfectionism and high psychological distress group showed a manner of striving to be perfect for interpersonal dimensions that caused distressing and they felt loss of freedom. Thus, socially prescribed perfectionism was related with psychological distress in both low perfectionism and high perfectionism groups.

The finding of this study was possible and reasonable in that striving to be perfect others' expectations on self and to please others (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism) was more prone to express the same response of loss of freedom and psychological distress (e.g., stress, depression, anxiety) related with their perfectionism among student teachers. The results of this study offered important implications for counselling with socially prescribed perfectionists that perceived high psychological distress.

To overcome high level of socially prescribed perfectionism, parents, teachers and caregivers should reduce the influence of unrealistic expectations that might fuel much of their drive for perfectionism by comparing with others. They should foster perfectionism based on the student teachers' aptitudes, capabilities, and talents to reach their full potential and obtain better performance in today's performance-oriented society.

Counselors and educators might develop interventions to help student teachers to alter such socially prescribed perfectionistic thoughts directly, such as identifying automatic thoughts associated with the need to be perfect for others, examining these thoughts for distortions, and then restructuring or eliminating these thoughts so that they no longer have harmful influences on their feelings and behaviors (e.g., Ferguson & Rodway, 1994). Further, it is necessary to consider meaningful prevention and intervention planning for student teachers with high level of socially prescribed perfectionism during the training period since perfectionism problems are widely spread out in teaching profession.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study was conducted with a cross-sectional study design, so longitudinal studies should be employed to determine the development of perfectionistic attitudes. This study included only one university of education and two education degree colleges. To be more representative, future research should be conducted with the remaining universities of education and education degree colleges. Moreover, participants comprised only student teachers. Additionally, more empirical studies among other populations such as in-service teachers, adolescents, basic education students and other university students should be studied to elucidate the importance of perfectionism in psychological distress.

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