Striving for perfection: The influence of perfectionism on English language proficiency among Chinese non-English majors

Ye Tao*, Ilyana Jalaluddin, and Zalina Mohd Kasim
Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

As a significant personality trait that drives individuals to pursue excellence and adhere to the highest standards, perfectionism plays a vital role in language acquisition. In light of this, the present study aims to examine the relationship between perfectionism and English language proficiency among non-English majors. Utilizing the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale for Chinese (CFMPS) (Frost et al., 1990), an online questionnaire was administered to 215 non-English majors to assess various dimensions of perfectionism. The participants' English proficiency was also measured using their College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) scores. Based on this standardized metric, their English language proficiency was quantified to further explore its association with perfectionism. To achieve the research objectives, the collected data were analyzed using various statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, ANOVA, and logistic regression. The results indicated that participants exhibited a high level of perfectionism both overall and across its various dimensions. Moreover, significant differences in perfectionism were observed based on gender and grade level, while no differences emerged across majors. Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was found between perfectionism and English proficiency. In summary, the findings of this study are expected to provide deeper insights into the influence of perfectionism on language learning and other behavioral aspects of learners.

Keywords: English language proficiency; foreign language learning; non-English majors

INTRODUCTION

According to Renandya et al. (2018), language proficiency is the capacity of an individual to use language effectively in various social contexts. It involves not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also the capacity to use language to promote communication and establish connections with others. Foreign language proficiency (FLP), particularly in English, is deemed essential for modern individuals in a globalized world, serving as a key driver of economic development, intercultural communication, and educational/employment opportunities (Li et al., 2022; Novikova et al., 2020; Rao, 2019). As an influential language worldwide (Crompton et al., 2024), English proficiency enables China's international integration (Zhang & Wang, 2023) and equips individuals with competitive advantages. Its enhancement is therefore critical for national and personal adaptation to globalization demands.

In the view of Zeng and Wang (2023), China is still confronted with significant challenges, despite its investment of considerable resources in English language education and attempt to foster innovation in this field. In the foreign language education system implemented across China, the traditional Exam-Oriented Education is deeply entrenched (Yu & Liu, 2022). Meanwhile, due to the sense of oppression associated with Exam-Oriented Education, other factors that may influence their

*Corresponding author
Email: yet6051@gmail.com

language learning have been undervalued by some teachers and students. Despite the aforementioned circumstances, the core value of language learning has always prompted researchers to identify other factors that influence language learning through various strategies, such as personality traits and affective factors (Taherkhani & Karbakhsh Ravari, 2018).

Notably, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2000) highlighted personality traits as one of the most significant predictors of language competence when exploring influential factors in language learning. Additionally, Pourfeiz (2015) indicated that only personality traits enable students to make the best use of their distinctive strengths in balancing and compensating for their deficiencies simultaneously during the language learning process. Nevertheless, personality traits are often overlooked by learners during this process (Zafarani et al., 2022). Therefore, researchers should pay greater attention to examining the influence of personality traits on learners, with the aim of making meaningful suggestions on how to improve their learning outcomes.

Multidimensional Model of Perfectionism
Cattell (1950) proposed that personality can be classified into 16 major types, one of which is perfectionism. This trait is characterized by an excessive pursuit of perfection, extremely demanding standards, and a tendency to evaluate one's behavior excessively critically (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Pacht, 1984; Sand et al., 2021). Previously, perfectionism was considered a unidimensional construct (Burns, 1980). However, this unidimensional concept has gradually been replaced by more comprehensive multidimensional conceptualizations as the relevant research has progressed (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

This study is theoretically grounded in the multidimensional model of perfectionism proposed by Frost et al. (1990), which highlights the dynamic interaction between individuals' internal motivation and external social pressures. The model comprises five subdimensions, offering a systematic framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms of perfectionism across various contexts, particularly its multifaceted influence within the domain of language learning.

Specifically, the dimension of Concern over Mistakes (CM) reflects a heightened sensitivity to failure and the accompanying anxiety, constituting a core feature of maladaptive perfectionism. In the context of language learning, this trait is often associated with increased language anxiety and a reduced willingness to communicate. The Organization (OR) dimension, characterized by a preference for structured and orderly behavior, can facilitate the effective planning and execution of learning tasks. However, when this tendency becomes excessively rigid, it may hinder the flexible adaptation of learning strategies in response to changing contexts or demands. The Parental Expectations (PE) dimension represents external social pressures, particularly pronounced in exam-oriented educational cultures. While such expectations may serve as a source of motivation, they can also lead to a heightened sense of burden. The dimension of Personal Standards (PS) captures the motivational aspect of perfectionism; when moderate, it can drive academic progress, but overly ambitious goals may lead to self-doubt and negative self-evaluation. Finally, the dimension of Doubts about Actions (DA) undermines learners' confidence and stability in language production, negatively impacting their performance. In conclusion, the multidimensional model of perfectionism proposed by Frost et al. (1990) illustrates the complex and multifaceted pathways through which perfectionism operates in the process of language learning.

Perfectionism as a Predictor of Language Proficiency
Regarding language acquisition, perfectionism has increasingly attracted researchers' attention because it involves setting exceptionally high standards and the constant pursuit of perfection. When acquiring a language, perfectionistic learners endeavor to develop and demonstrate language abilities similar to native speakers. Lin (2020) revealed a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and language proficiency. Razmi et al. (2020) stressed that language learning can be influenced by individual differences in perfectionism. As argued by Zafarani et al. (2022), perfectionism is widely recognized as a significant predictor of language performance. According to Tao and Yu (2024), perfectionism affects the complexity and diversity of language learning. These studies collectively demonstrate that perfectionism significantly impacts language learning, not only in terms of overall proficiency but also in the complexity and variety exhibited throughout the learning process.

In addition, previous studies have primarily focused on the negative impact of perfectionism on language learning. For instance, Dewaele (2012) indicated that language learning can be severely hindered by the stress caused by perfectionism. This view is supported by Sönmez and Kurtoğlu (2021), who pointed out that low achievement in language production results to a certain extent from perfectionism, as perfectionists dread making mistakes, which reduces the opportunity for actual language use. Similarly, Zafarani et al. (2022) highlighted that perfectionism can lead to high levels of anxiety among English learners, which not only affects their mental well-being but also hinders their performance, particularly during language tests and real-world communication. Khosravi et al.

(2023) further supported this view, stating that learners with high levels of perfectionism are more prone to experiencing language-related anxiety. On the contrary, Movafaghardestani et al. (2024) emphasized that such anxiety impairs learners' ability to perform effectively under pressure, especially when acquiring a new language. Additionally, Goulet-Pelletier et al. (2022) cited bloggers' descriptions of perfectionism as a "killer of creativity," underscoring its inhibitory effect on creativity in language learning. Ultimately, since language acquisition is inherently a process of continuous trial and error, the tendency of perfectionists to avoid language practice and struggle with self-confidence due to their fear of making mistakes not only limits their opportunities for improvement but also significantly slows their overall progress.

On the other hand, there are advantageous facets to perfectionism. Silverman (1999) states it is a double-edged sword, as it promotes the pursuit of excellence and unparalleled brilliance. However, it may lead to disappointment or despair if expectations are excessively elevated. Bieling et al. (2004) also noted that students excel in the presence of perfectionism, while others have difficulties. Excessive meticulousness in language acquisition may yield both advantageous and detrimental outcomes. It can inspire children to achieve proficiency in many language arts, but it can also risk misguiding them due to negative attitudes and actions, such as an irrational fear of errors (Bieling et al., 2004). According to Huang et al. (2020), negative thought patterns can hinder learning in the presence of perfectionism. Hence, further study is required to examine whether and how perfectionism can be beneficial in motivating individuals to achieve their language proficiency goals without allowing it to overwhelm them.

Despite the growing recognition of perfectionism's influence on learning, there remains a lack of in-depth research on its relationship with English learning in China's exam-oriented education system. The exam-centric nature of Chinese education makes it an ideal context for investigating the correlation between perfectionist tendencies and English proficiency. High-stake standardized exams, such as the College Entrance Examination and the College English Test, exert immense pressure on students to achieve academic excellence. In this highly competitive environment, perfectionism is often viewed as a commendable trait. However, the accompanying stress, anxiety, and fear of failure can significantly hinder students' language learning progress (Sepiadou & Metallidou, 2023). At the same time, adaptive perfectionism may enhance students' diligence and precision, helping them achieve higher levels of accuracy in language use. Given the increasing importance of English proficiency for academic and professional success,

examining this phenomenon within the Chinese educational context is crucial.

From the above literature review, it is evident that some researchers have explored the relationship between perfectionism and language learning. A correlation between the two has been identified, emphasizing the significance of perfectionism in language learning. However, it is noteworthy that within the field of language acquisition, there is still a lack of studies conducted in China to explore how the unique personality trait of perfectionism influences language learning. Although Chinese researchers have made significant progress in the study of personality, existing research has primarily focused on the introversion-extroversion dimension and the Big Five personality traits (Zhang & Wang, 2023), while the role of perfectionism remains largely underexplored. Given the complexity of perfectionism and its potential impact on various aspects of language learning, further investigation is warranted to understand its unique role in this process better.

To address the identified gap in the literature, this study aims to examine perfectionism within the context of Chinese EFL learning. Firstly, it investigates the levels of perfectionism and English language proficiency among Chinese EFL learners at the university used for this study. Secondly, it explores whether significant differences exist in perfectionism based on gender, grade level, and major. Finally, the study conducts an in-depth analysis of the correlation between perfectionism and English language proficiency, offering a comprehensive perspective on this topic. By enriching the existing literature on the influence of perfectionism in EFL learning, this study also provides practical insights for educators seeking to enhance language instruction and student performance.

The following research questions are proposed in light of the aforementioned points, and the hypothesized model is presented in Figure 1 for reference.

1) What is the level of perfectionism of Chinese EFL learners at the university used for this study?
2) What is the level of English language proficiency of Chinese EFL learners at the university used for this study?
3) Are there any significant differences in the perfectionism of Chinese EFL learners at the university used for this study regarding gender, grade level, and major?
4) Is there a significant relationship between perfectionism and English language proficiency of Chinese EFL learners at the university used for this study?

METHOD
Research Design
This study adopted a quantitative research method, specifically a correlational research design, as it enables the investigation of relationships and differences among variables systematically and statistically (Curtis et al., 2016). This design is well-suited to achieving the research objectives, as it facilitates both descriptive and inferential analysis of the associations between individual characteristics and language learning outcomes.

Firstly, questionnaire data were analyzed to identify the distribution patterns of perfectionism levels and English language proficiency among Chinese EFL learners. Secondly, the study examined whether perfectionism varied across gender, grade level, and major, allowing for a comparison of group differences. Finally, logistic regression analysis was conducted to explore the potential relationship between perfectionism and English language proficiency. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized model guiding this study.

Figure 1
The Hypothesized Model
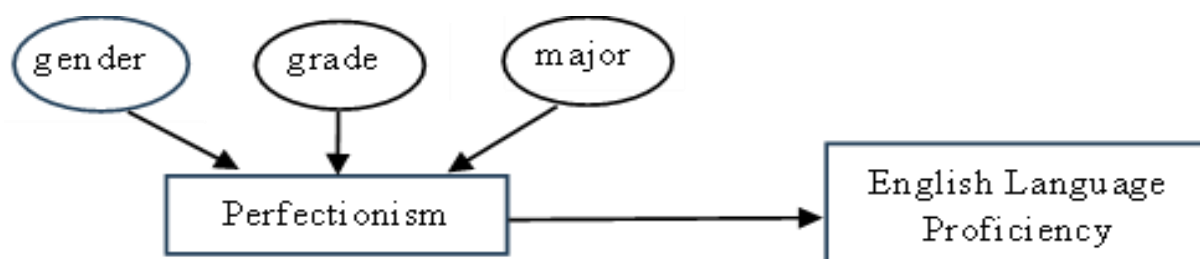
As shown in Figure 1, this hypothesized model suggests that individual factors (gender, grade level, and major) may influence learners' levels of perfectionism, which is further assumed to be associated with their English language proficiency. This model is the conceptual framework for selecting variables and structuring statistical analyses, including group comparisons and logistic regression. By visualizing these relationships, the model provides a clear basis for the correlational research design employed in this study.

Participants
This study was conducted in the Chinese context, with a sample comprising non-English majors from a public university in China. Convenience sampling was employed to recruit 219 participants who voluntarily took part in the study, and 215 students who completed the questionnaire were selected as the final sample. The participants were not limited by their major, gender, or grade level, consisting of 107 male and 108 female students. Regarding major, 53.5% of the participants were from the social science (n = 115), while 46.5% were from the science (n = 100).

A significant characteristic of the sample is that English was a foreign language for all participants, and they primarily learned it by attending English classes at the university twice a week. Their main motivation for learning English was passing the CET-4.

Instruments
This study primarily relied on a comprehensive Chinese-language questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part involves the background information about the participants, including gender, major, grade level, and CET-4 test scores. The second part measures participants' levels of perfectionism through 27 items adapted from the CFMPS, ensuring that the assessment captured all relevant dimensions of perfectionism within the study context. These well-designed items evaluated adaptive and maladaptive tendencies, which are essential for understanding how perfectionism influences language development. A detailed description of the scales used in the questionnaire is provided below.

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale for Chinese (CFMPS)
The Chinese version of the CFMPS was employed to conduct this study as a multidimensional measure of perfectionism among participants. This version of the questionnaire was revised by Zi and Zhou (2006), based on the original scale developed by Frost (1990), using a sample of mainland Chinese undergraduate students. The revised scale consists of 27 items and encompasses five dimensions. The CFMPS uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perfectionism. The internal consistency of the overall scale and its subscales was evaluated to further assess the instrument, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	N of Items
Perfectionism	.973	27
Concern about mistakes	.890	6
Organization	.885	6
Parental expectations	.857	5
The setting of high personal standards	.886	6
Doubt about actions	.834	4

As shown in Table 1, the CFMPS demonstrates high internal consistency. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale is .973, indicating excellent reliability. Each of the five subscales also shows strong internal consistency, with coefficients ranging from .834 to .890. According to Taber (2018), a Cronbach's alpha of .70 or higher generally indicates acceptable reliability or internal consistency for a measurement instrument. Thus, the obtained coefficients support the reliability of the CFMPS as an appropriate instrument for assessing perfectionism among Chinese EFL learners in the present study.

English Proficiency Test
In this study, the CET-4 scores were used as a criterion to evaluate the English language proficiency of the participants. As a national standardized test with high reliability and validity, the CET is divided into CET-4 and CET-6. It is specifically designed to assess the comprehensive English proficiency of non-English majors and is primarily based on the *Teaching Requirements for College English Courses*. The CET consists of four sections, with the following weight distribution: 35% for listening, 35% for reading, 30% for translation, and 30% for writing. In contrast to criterion-referenced assessments, the CET does not have a definitive passing threshold; instead, institutions frequently establish their standards for evaluating students' abilities based on CET results. The norm-referenced scores for CET-4 and CET-6 range from 220 to 710. The scores of each test are converted into reported scores using a norm-referenced formula, as shown below:

$$TotSco = \frac{(X - Mean)}{SD} * 70 + 500$$

Sources: National Education Examinations Authority (n.d.)

In this formula, *TotSco* represents the total (scaled) score, *X* denotes the raw total score of each examinee before normative conversion, *Mean* refers to the normative mean, and *SD* indicates the normative standard deviation. Each candidate's reported score corresponds to a specific percentile rank within the normative group. In this study, participants were categorized into four proficiency levels based on their CET scores: Beginner level (220 – 430 points), Lower-Intermediate level (431 – 500 points), Upper-Intermediate level (501 – 570 points), and Advanced level (571 – 710 points). This classification is aligned with the proficiency standards established by Wang et al. (2023).

Procedures
The data used in this study was collected through a questionnaire filled out by the participants. Before administering the questionnaire, participants were provided with a brief introduction outlining the questionnaire's content and purpose. They were informed that all responses would remain confidential and be used solely for research. Data collection was conducted following standardized instructions to ensure participants clearly understood how to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via an application named *SurveyStar* (https://www.wjx.cn/vm/mh1FP4x.aspx#), which enhanced convenience for participants while facilitating efficient data collection, organization, and analysis for the researchers. Following data collection, all responses were carefully reviewed. Of the 219 responses received, 215 fully completed and valid responses were retained for analysis after excluding incomplete or invalid responses.

Data Analysis
After data collection, SPSS 26.0 was employed to conduct statistical analysis from two main perspectives: the level of perfectionism and their English language proficiency. Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were first used to understand participants' perfectionism levels and English test scores. Subsequently, inferential statistical analyses were conducted using independent samples *t*-test and one-way ANOVA to examine whether statistically significant differences existed in participants' perfectionism levels based on gender, grade level,

and major. Specifically, independent samples *t*-tests were used to investigate differences by gender and major, while a one-way ANOVA was performed to assess variations by grade level. Additionally, logistic regression analyses were carried out to determine whether there was a correlation between participants' perfectionism and their English language proficiency. Before conducting inferential analyses, the normality of data distribution was verified, as this is a prerequisite for many parametric statistical tests.

RESULTS
Demographic Information of Participants
Table 2 presents an overview of the participants' demographic information, including gender, grade level, major, and CET 4 score range.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 215)

Description	Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	107	49.8
	Female	108	50.2
Grade level	First-year student	53	24.7
	Second-year student	49	22.8
	Third-year student	62	28.8
	Fourth-year student	51	23.7
Major	Social science	115	53.5
	Science	100	46.5
The score range of CET 4	220 – 430	10	4.7
	431 – 500	156	72.6
	501 – 570	39	18.1
	571 – 710	10	4.7
Total		**215**	**100**

As shown in Table 2, the number of male participants is nearly equal to that of female participants. In terms of grade level, third-year students account for the largest proportion (n = 62, 28.8%). However, the overall distribution across all four grade levels is relatively balanced, with no significant disparities among categories. Regarding majors, students majoring in social science (53.5%) slightly outnumber those in science-related fields (46.5%). As for CET-4 results, most participants (n = 156, 72.6%) scored between 431 and 600, and it was followed by a smaller group (n = 39) whose scores fell between 401 and 570. In contrast, relatively few students scored in the lowest (220 – 430) or highest (571 – 710) ranges. The analysis indicates that the sample distribution is generally balanced despite minor variations across demographic categories.

Level of Perfectionism of Chinese EFL Learners
This study investigated the levels of perfectionism among Chinese non-English major students. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for overall perfectionism and its subdimensions, providing insight into the perfectionism traits exhibited by the participants.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of CFMPS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Perfectionism	215	1.57	5.00	3.903	.780	High
CM	215	1.67	5.00	3.901	.801	High
OR	215	2.00	5.00	3.887	.813	High
PE	215	1.80	5.00	3.866	.803	High
PS	215	1.50	5.00	3.902	.774	High
DA	215	1.75	5.00	3.916	.810	High
Valid N (listwise)	**215**					

As shown in Table 3, the overall perfectionism score (M = 3.90, SD = 0.78) indicates that most students exhibit a relatively high level of perfectionism. Among the subdimensions, CM (M = 3.90, SD = 0.80) and DA (M = 3.92, SD = 0.81) received the highest mean scores, suggesting that students are highly sensitive to mistakes and frequently experience uncertainty about their performance. PS (M = 3.90, SD = 0.77) and PE (M = 3.87, SD = 0.80) showed relatively high means, reflecting students' tendencies to set ambitious goals and perceive substantial parental pressure. Additionally, OR (M = 3.89, SD = 0.81) yielded a slightly lower mean but still indicates a consistent preference for maintaining order and structure in academic and daily life. Overall, the findings suggest that non-English major students generally demonstrate high levels of perfectionism, particularly in their sensitivity to mistakes and fear of failure, which may contribute to increased anxiety levels.

Level of English Language Proficiency of Chinese EFL Learners
This study also examined the participants' varying English language proficiency levels. Based on the percentile rankings of the candidates and the classification framework proposed by Wang et al. (2023), the participants' CET-4 scores were categorized into four distinct proficiency levels. The specific details of this classification are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Students' Levels of English Language Proficiency

Levels of English Language Proficiency	Frequency	Percent (%)
Elementary level (220 – 430)	10	4.7
Lower intermediate level (431 – 500)	156	72.6
Upper intermediate level (501 – 570)	39	18.1
Advanced level (571 – 710)	10	4.7
Total	**215**	**100**

As shown in Table 4, most participants fall within the lower-intermediate proficiency level, accounting for 72.6% of the total sample, indicating that most individuals possess basic communicative competence but may struggle with complex grammatical structures and academic writing tasks. Additionally, 18.1% of participants are classified at the upper-intermediate level, representing a smaller group with stronger language comprehension and expression abilities. Notably, the proportions of participants at the elementary and advanced levels are both 4.7%, suggesting that only a small subset of learners exhibit either minimal or near-native English proficiency. This distribution reflects a pronounced concentration of English proficiency at the intermediate level, with relatively few high- or low-proficiency users. These results may be influenced by factors such as educational background, language learning environment, and frequency of English use.

Differences in Chinese EFL Learners' Perfectionism by Gender, Grade Level, and Major
This study also examined differences in perfectionist tendencies across various demographic characteristics to gain a deeper understanding of perfectionism as a variable. To this end, independent samples *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted to analyze the differences in perfectionism among participants.

Perfectionism and Gender
This study further examined gender-based differences in perfectionism by comparing the levels of perfectionism between male and female participants. In addition to the overall analysis, the five dimensions of perfectionism were also explored, as presented in Table 5. Table 5 shows significant differences (p < .05) between male and female participants across all dimensions: CM, OR, PE, PS, and DA. The results indicate that male participants exhibited significantly higher perfectionism levels than female participants.

Perfectionism and Grade Levels
Tables 6 and 7 present the results of the one-way ANOVA analyses, indicating that significant perfectionism differences exist among grade levels.
Further analysis of the sub-dimensions reveals statistically significant differences (*p* < .05) among the CM, OR, PE, and PS grade levels. However, no significant difference was found in DA. Additionally, Table 7 shows a multiple comparison analysis to determine the significant differences between groups. According to the Post Hoc test, a statistically significant difference was found in perfectionism between first-year and third-year students (*p* = .002). The p-value below the alpha level of .05 indicates a significant difference between these two groups. Specifically, first-year students demonstrated significantly higher levels of perfectionism than third-year students.

Table 5
Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
CM	Equal variances assumed	27.869	.000	11.430	213	.000	.985	.086	.815	1.155
	Equal variances not assumed			11.451	185.404	.000	.985	.086	.815	1.155
OR	Equal variances assumed	23.930	.000	12.783	213	.000	1.069	.084	.904	1.234
	Equal variances not assumed			12.806	187.302	.000	1.069	.083	.904	1.233
PE	Equal variances assumed	34.443	.000	12.873	213	.000	1.059	.082	.897	1.221
	Equal variances not assumed			12.897	184.370	.000	1.059	.082	.897	1.221
PS	Equal variances assumed	22.629	.000	11.846	213	.000	.973	.082	.811	1.135
	Equal variances not assumed			11.868	185.782	.000	.973	.082	.811	1.134
DA	Equal variances assumed	30.548	.000	12.378	213	.000	1.046	.084	.879	1.212
	Equal variances not assumed			12.405	176.622	.000	1.046	.084	.879	1.212
Total	Equal variances assumed	30.467	.000	12.687	213	.000	1.021	.080	.862	1.180
	Equal variances not assumed			12.713	179.250	.000	1.021	.080	.863	1.180

Table 6
ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CM	Between Groups	5.124	3	1.708	2.728	.045
	Within Groups	132.092	211	.626		
	Total	137.217	214			
OR	Between Groups	6.050	3	2.017	3.143	.026
	Within Groups	135.363	211	.642		
	Total	141.413	214			
PE	Between Groups	5.358	3	1.786	2.845	.039
	Within Groups	132.464	211	.628		
	Total	137.822	214			
PS	Between Groups	4.717	3	1.572	2.690	.047
	Within Groups	123.343	211	.585		
	Total	128.060	214			
DA	Between Groups	4.986	3	1.662	2.588	.054
	Within Groups	135.507	211	.642		
	Total	140.493	214			
Total	Between Groups	6.171	3	2.057	3.500	.016
	Within Groups	124.017	211	.588		
	Total	130.188	214			

Table 7
Multiple Comparisons, Dependent Variable: Perfectionism, LSD

(I) Grade	(J) Grade	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
First-year student	Second-year student	.175	.152	.251	-.125	.474
	Third-year student	.452*	.143	.002	.169	.734
	Fourth-year student	.291	.150	.054	-.005	.588
Second-year student	First-year student	-.175	.152	.251	-.474	.125
	Third-year student	.277	.147	.060	-.012	.566
	Fourth-year student	.116	.153	.449	-.186	.419
Third-year student	First-year student	-.452*	.143	.002	-.734	-.169
	Second-year student	-.277	.147	.060	-.566	.0122
	Fourth-year student	-.160	.145	.270	-.446	.125
Fourth-year student	First-year student	-.291	.150	.054	-.588	.005
	Second-year student	-.116	.153	.449	-.419	.186
	Third-year student	.160	.145	.270	-.125	.446

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

Perfectionism and Major

In this section, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine overall perfectionism and its five sub-dimensions across majors.

As presented in Table 8, no statistically significant differences were found between students majoring in social science and those majoring in science across any of the five dimensions. All p-values exceeded the threshold of .05, indicating that major does not appear to influence perfectionism levels in this sample.

Table 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 Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
CM	Equal variances assumed	1.271	.261	.638	213	.524	.070	.110	-.146	.286
	Equal variances not assumed			.637	206.035	.525	.070	.110	-.147	.287
OR	Equal variances assumed	.005	.945	.787	213	.432	.088	.111	-.132	.307
	Equal variances not assumed			.787	209.350	.432	.088	.111	-.132	.307
PE	Equal variances assumed	.108	.743	.955	213	.341	.105	.110	-.112	.321
	Equal variances not assumed			.957	210.713	.340	.105	.109	-.111	.321
PS	Equal variances assumed	.000	.996	1.073	213	.285	.113	.106	-.095	.322
	Equal variances not assumed			1.075	210.709	.283	.113	.105	-.095	.321
DA	Equal variances assumed	.465	.496	1.077	213	.283	.119	.111	-.099	.338
	Equal variances not assumed			1.077	209.025	.283	.119	.111	-.099	.338
Total	Equal variances assumed	.712	.400	.739	213	.460	.079	.107	-.132	.289
	Equal variances not assumed			.739	208.323	.416	.079	.107	-.132	.290

Relationship between Perfectionism and English Language Proficiency of Chinese EFL Learners

In this section, a logistic regression analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 to examine the relationship between perfectionism and English language proficiency. Perfectionism was treated as the independent variable, while English proficiency served as the dependent variable. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 9 below.

As shown in Table 9, the chi-square value of the model is 14.41, with a *p*-value of .002, which is less than the significance threshold of .05, indicating that the model is statistically significant. The R² value is .062, suggesting that perfectionism accounts for approximately 6.2% of the variance in CET-4 scores. Moreover, perfectionism as an independent variable significantly predicts CET-4 performance ($p < .05$).

Table 9
Likelihood Ratio Tests

Effect	Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	145.176	23.488	3	.000
Perfectionism	136.098	14.411	3	.002

Table 10
Parameter Estimates

Band score of CET 4[a]		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
431 – 500	Intercept	-.388	1.343	.083	1	.773			
	Perfectionism	.875	.391	4.996	1	.025	2.398	1.114	5.165
501 – 570	Intercept	-2.867	1.588	3.258	1	.071			
	Perfectionism	1.151	.443	6.765	1	.009	3.161	1.328	7.526
571 – 710	Intercept	-10.092	3.605	7.838	1	.005			
	Perfectionism	2.519	.843	8.934	1	.003	12.415	2.380	64.756

a. The reference category is 220 – 430.

The results of the parameter estimates are presented in Table 10. As indicated by the *p*-values, perfectionism has a statistically significant effect on the CET-4 score ranges. According to the odds ratio (OR), for every one-unit increase in perfectionism, the likelihood of achieving a CET-4 score between 431 and 500 increases by a factor of 2.398, relative to the baseline range of 220 – 430. Similarly, the odds of scoring between 501 and 570 increase by a factor of 3.161, while the probability of obtaining a score between 571 and 710 increases by 12.415 times. These findings suggest that the level of perfectionism among non-English major students has a significant effect on their CET-4 performance. Specifically, students in the lower score bands tend to exhibit lower levels of perfectionism, whereas those in higher score bands show significantly higher perfectionist tendencies.

The parameter estimates yield the following logistic regression equations:

$$\text{Logit}(P_{b/a}) = -0.388 + 0.875 \times \text{Perfectionism}$$

$$\text{Logit}(P_{c/a}) = -2.867 + 1.151 \times \text{Perfectionism}$$

$$\text{Logit}(P_{d/a}) = -10.092 + 2.519 \times \text{Perfectionism}$$

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the relationship between perfectionism levels and English proficiency among Chinese university students who are not majoring in English. Additionally, it examined the influence of external factors such as gender, grade level, and major on students' perfectionism levels. The findings indicated that Chinese non-English majors exhibit a high level of perfectionism, scoring notably across all five subdimensions of perfectionism. Among the participants, the majority were classified as perfectionists, suggesting that many students invest significant effort in their academic pursuits to achieve outstanding performance. These findings align with those of Chen et al. (2022), who reported a prevalent tendency toward high perfectionism among university students. Similarly, Ge and Wang (2017) found elevated levels of perfectionism in their study of Chinese university students. While this pursuit of perfection reflects students' strong academic commitment, it may pose challenges for non-English majors in language acquisition. In particular, maladaptive perfectionism may hinder students' willingness to explore new aspects of the language, making them reluctant to experiment or take reasonable risks in language learning (Xiong et al., 2024).

The data analysis across several dimensions of perfectionism shows a significant increase in negative perfectionism among Chinese university students. This heightened perfectionism appears to be influenced by internal and external factors. The self-worth-based perfectionism is found in students who closely relate their self-worth to academic or language learning success. Perfectionists often believe their performance determines their value (Kinman & Grant, 2022). As a result, such students tend to exert significant effort to achieve high standards, driven by the desire to feel competent and validated. Another influential aspect of perfectionism is the fear of failure. Many students adopt perfectionist behaviors as a strategy to avoid external criticism and internal self-criticism. They assume that striving for perfection can prevent the shame, disappointment, and negative evaluation associated with failure. Perfectionism can serve as a psychological defense mechanism, protecting individuals from the emotional distress associated with making mistakes. University students are often susceptible to external pressures, which may contribute to developing perfectionistic tendencies. These pressures include societal and familial expectations, particularly concerning English language learning. Many students report that they feel compelled to meet these expectations to achieve success and receive recognition. Consequently, they may pursue perfection, believing that excelling will bring them validation and attention. However, this interpretation contrasts with the findings of Ge and Wang (2017), who argue that the low level of negative perfectionism observed among college students is because they do not set excessively high or unrealistic standards. According to their study, students are generally more accepting of failure and are willing to adapt to setbacks. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) found that although a high level of perfectionism is prevalent among college students, it is predominantly characterized by positive rather than negative traits.

The results of this study on participants' English proficiency levels suggest a generally low level of proficiency among non-English majors. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Zhang (2021) but contrasts with those of Hu et al. (2024), who investigated the CET-4 scores of undergraduate students at a university in Beijing. The study by Hu et al. (2024) revealed relatively high CET-4 scores among non-English majors, which may be attributed to Beijing's unique status and resource advantages, potentially providing its students with a comparative advantage in English learning.

Moreover, this study examined whether significant differences exist in perfectionism levels among Chinese students based on gender, grade level, and major. Firstly, gender-based differences in perfectionism were found, with male students exhibiting higher levels than female students. This supports Ytterdal's (2018) findings that men tend to demonstrate higher levels of perfectionism than women. Similarly, studies by Fernández-García et al. (2022) and Chui and Wong (2017) indicate that males are likely to exhibit extreme perfectionist tendencies. Several explanations have been proposed for this disparity, many of which relate to cultural and societal influences. In Chinese society, as in many others, there is a prevailing social expectation that men should be strong, independent, and successful. As a result, male students may internalize these gender norms and the associated expectations for achievement, thereby increasing their tendency toward perfectionism. Zhang and Wang (2023) suggest that such societal norms may place additional pressure on male students to strive for perfection. In some cultural contexts, sons are often held to higher standards than daughters. Chui and Wong (2017) further argue that boys may internalize this pressure more acutely due to these heightened expectations.

Secondly, the study revealed that first-year students exhibit a higher tendency toward perfectionism than third-year students. This finding is consistent with Hao (2015), who suggested that first-year students, during their initial phase of university adaptation, are more susceptible to perfectionistic tendencies as they may experience anxiety about their new environment and strive to perform academically. Smith et al. (2022) further noted that first-year students often transfer a task-oriented perfectionist mindset from high school into university, where academic tasks are more innovation-driven. This maladaptive transition can exacerbate self-critical thoughts. Additionally, as these students adjust to the autonomous learning environment of higher education, they often experience achievement anxiety resulting from intense academic competition and identity reconstruction. A cross-cultural study by Curran and Hill (2019) found that perfectionism levels among university students globally have significantly increased over the past 30 years, with first-year students particularly susceptible to setting excessively high standards as a coping strategy for managing uncertainty. While such perfectionism may yield short-term academic benefits, it is also associated with long-term psychological risks, including emotional exhaustion (Madigan, 2021).

Finally, the findings of this study differ from previous research concerning differences in perfectionism based on major. While Hao (2015) and Ma (2023) reported significant differences in perfectionism between students majoring in the sciences and those in the social sciences, the present study did not identify any statistically significant differences. One possible explanation is that students, regardless of their major, are subject to similar academic pressures, leading to a

convergence in perfectionism levels across majors. Moreover, university students across all fields commonly experience concerns related to academic performance, future career prospects, and an increasingly competitive job market. Given that students strive for academic excellence and seek to distinguish themselves in their professional development these shared high standards and expectations may contribute to a sustained level of perfectionism across disciplines (Chen et al., 2018). Overall, the findings suggest that under the shared influence of the academic environment, students' perfectionism levels tend to exhibit a degree of consistency across different fields of study.

Furthermore, one of the most significant findings of this study is the statistically significant positive correlation between perfectionism and English proficiency. This result aligns with the findings of Fernández-García et al. (2022), who suggested that individuals with perfectionism, characterized by the setting of high standards and persistent goal pursuit, are more likely to achieve academic success, thereby reinforcing the conclusions of the present study. Similarly, Loscalzo et al. (2019) argued that perfectionists often make faster progress in learning due to their goal-oriented mindset and strong motivation for achievement and self-improvement. However, some researchers have questioned the positive effects of perfectionism. For example, Grugan et al. (2021) noted that extreme perfectionism may hinder academic performance, while Madigan (2019) found that excessive perfectionism can result in heightened anxiety, reduced perceived control, and other adverse psychological outcomes that negatively affect learning. Therefore, although perfectionism may facilitate academic development to a certain extent, maintaining a balance between striving for excellence and mitigating its potential negative effects remains an important area for further research.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and English language proficiency. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between the level of perfectionism and English language proficiency among non-English majors. This suggests the influential role of perfectionism as a personality trait in the process of language acquisition. Given that language acquisition inherently involves trial and error, it is essential for effective language development to encourage learners to embrace imperfection and to shift their focus from achieving flawless performance to making continuous progress.

In language learning, students who approach their performance with greater self-compassion and accept the inevitability of imperfection are often better equipped to cope with the challenges inherent in the learning process. For such students, perfectionism can serve as a positive motivational force rather than a source of pressure, provided that they can engage with this trait constructively. Moderate levels of perfectionism may foster goal-oriented behavior and perseverance, thereby contributing to improved language performance. Conversely, excessive perfectionism can lead to unrealistic self-expectations and heightened anxiety, undermining learning efficiency and diminishing learners' interest in language learning. Therefore, while striving for perfection, it is crucial for students to recognize the double-edged nature of perfectionism and to seek a balance between the pursuit of achievement and the maintenance of psychological well-being.

In addition, both parents and teachers should also guide students to view mistakes as opportunities for growth rather than failures. From an instructional perspective, the first step is to help students avoid setting overly demanding goals, thereby maintaining their motivation and sense of accomplishment. Secondly, creating a supportive learning environment that normalizes mistakes is essential as an integral part of the learning process. When students make mistakes, their efforts should be acknowledged, followed by constructive, positive feedback to support improvement. Furthermore, educators should encourage students to focus on the learning process and the effort they invest rather than solely on outcomes. Emphasizing that language learning requires consistent practice and gradual progress rather than immediate perfection can help reframe their expectations. In conclusion, although the impact of perfectionism remains complex and context-dependent, promoting positive perfectionism while mitigating negative tendencies may foster more effective and emotionally sustainable learning experiences.

This study contributes to the growing knowledge of research on perfectionism and language acquisition among Chinese students. The findings highlight perfectionism as a significant psychological factor influencing classroom performance. Although the study is limited to non-English majors at a single Chinese university, it offers a foundation for future research to replicate and extend its conclusions with other populations, educational contexts, and methodological approaches. Future studies employing diverse assessment tools and mixed-methods designs may further uncover the predictive power of perfectionism across various learning environments.

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