

香港資優教育學苑
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

RESEARCH BRIEF

Student Programme: “A Date with Perfectionism” Evaluation of the 2-day workshop

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Introduction

In relation to psychological research, the concept of Perfectionism was influenced by three main scholars. Both Burns (1980) and Pacht (1984) constructed a negative view on Perfectionism. Burns suggested that perfectionists tend to strain impossible goals. Also, Pacht echoed that and stated that perfectionists pursued unrealistic goals which they cannot possibly succeed. On the other hand, Hamachek (1978) suggested a health-neurotic continuum of perfectionism. He proposed that normal perfectionists allow themselves to fail and to be imperfect whereas neurotic perfectionists never feel that they are good enough. In other words, perfectionism could be associated with positive or neurotic personality traits.

Meyen and Skrtic (1995) suggested that perfectionism is one of the key elements of the gifted personality that should not be altered. Many research studies have found that perfectionism is associated with giftedness (Baker, 1996; Orange, 1997; Parker, 1997; Schuler, 2000). Baker (1996) proposed that gifted girls in 9th grade/Secondary 3 reported significantly higher levels of perfectionism than their counterparts with average ability. Also, Orange (1997) suggested that perfectionistic tendencies were shown by 89% of gifted high-school students. Moreover, Schuler (2000) assessed perfectionism in 112 secondary-school students (grade 7-8 who attended acceleration course in Math, English and Science) and found out that 87.5% were perfectionistic. Perfectionism, believed to be one of the key characteristics in gifted children, was the focus of a Personal Growth and Social Development programme, organised by the HKAGE Student Programmes and Services Division, namely “A Date with Perfectionism”. The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of this student programme are as follows:

1. Understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism
2. Debunk myths about perfectionism
3. Learn about the characteristics of the different types of perfectionists
4. Demonstrate their understanding of perfectionism and how it affects themselves
5. Through group discussions, compare and apply adaptive ways to deal with perfectionism at home or school

Based on the proposed ILOs, a pre-test and a post-test were developed and conducted to evaluate programme effectiveness.

Methodology

Prior to class, participants (N=15) were asked to complete a student learning questionnaire consisting of two parts. In the first part, participants were asked to report the extent to which they agree to the four statements (i.e. regarding their confidence in their understandings of perfectionism, e.g. I understand the concept of perfectionism). Participants rated the statements by using an 8-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 8= Strongly Agree). In the second part, participants were tested on their pre-existing knowledge of perfectionism. Eight multiple-choice questions were asked regarding the content of the workshop (e.g. which of the following is the characteristic of healthy perfectionism? A. Mastery-oriented, B. Performance-oriented, C. Often unsatisfied with high levels of effort, D. None of the above).

After the class, the same student learning form with an altered order of questions (i.e. post-test) was filled out by participants. The result of the pre-test was used as the baseline whilst the difference between the pre- and post-test was intended as a measure of programme effectiveness.

Results

The mean scores of the students' self-rating of understandings of perfectionism and content-related questions were calculated respectively. It can be seen from Figure 1 that there is a significant increase in the mean score of both parts of the questionnaire (Pre-test: self-rating: M=4.77, SD=1.11, content-related MC: M=4.93, SD=1.16; Post-test self-rating: M=6.37, SD=0.74, content-related MC: M=6.80, SD=1.01).

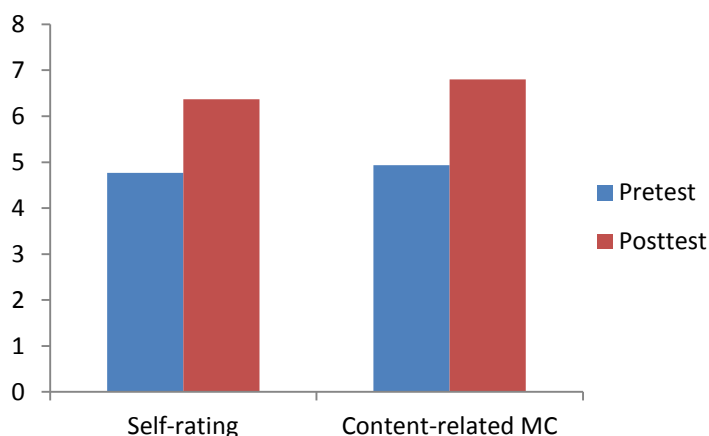


Figure 1. Mean scores in the pre-test and post-test

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were conducted to test whether the differences of mean scores between the pre-test and post-test are significant. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was run to each of the four statements (self-rating) in the first part. These self-rating statements were generated from the expected Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) proposed by the course organiser. A significant increase of the mean score for each statement could represent that each particular ILO had been accomplished after the programme.

Part 1: Self-rating of Understanding of Perfectionism

1. "I understand the concept of perfectionism."

A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test indicated that participants had higher understanding in the concept of perfectionism after the workshop (Mdn=6) than prior to it (Mdn=5,

$Z=2.97, p<0.01$).

2. *"I know how perfectionism affects me."*
Participants have higher confidence in their knowledge of the effect of perfectionism after the workshop (Mdn=7) than prior to it (Mdn=5, $Z=2.70, p<0.01$).
3. *"I can debunk myths about perfectionism."*
Participants have higher confidence in debunking myths about perfectionism after the workshop (Mdn=6) than prior to it (Mdn=4, $Z=3.22, p=0.001$).
4. *"I can list the characteristics of different types of perfectionism."*
Participants have higher confidence to list the characteristics of different types of perfectionism after the workshop (Mdn=7) than prior to it (Mdn=5, $Z=3.32, p=0.001$).

Part 2: Pre-existing knowledge vs. Gained knowledge

Prior to the programme, participants on average answered 5 out of 8 content-related multiple choice questions correctly. After the programme, the average number of correct answer has increased to 7 out of 8. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test showed participants significantly performed better in the content-related questions after the workshop (Mdn=7) than prior to it (Mdn=5, $Z=3.13, p<0.01$).

Discussion

The results of this study show that not only did the participants rate a higher level of confidence in their knowledge of perfectionism, but they also obtained higher test scores regarding course-related questions after taking part in the programme. The significant findings demonstrated an effective improvement in participants' understanding in perfectionism. This means that that intended learning outcomes of this programmes have been reached.

This programme made use of various teaching methods, including lecturing, games, group discussion and sharing, video clips, learning reflection worksheet and case studies. The effectiveness of this student programme might be related to some or a combination of these teaching modes. Future research is needed to identify the drivers of programme effectiveness.

The improvement in participants' self-rating of understanding of perfectionism could be attributed to demand characteristics, as participants might have noticed that the statements were generated from the poster and they might have guessed the purpose of the pre-test and post-test. Therefore, they might have altered the response to generate answers to accommodate the aims of the research. However, it is unlikely that the students' improvement in the content-related questions was due to participant's bias because, if this is the case, they would have to have deliberately answered some questions incorrectly in the pre-test. The consistency in higher confidence and higher content based knowledge level seems to suggest that the student members indeed have an increased understanding of perfectionism.

Another limitation of this research is that the re-test interval might be too short (i.e. one week) that the memory of the gained knowledge was still strong. A follow up study is needed in order to measure the long term effectiveness of this programme. The scope of such a study could go beyond knowledge gained, for example, we could also look into whether students apply what they have learnt from the programme in their everyday life.

Recommendations

1. As the results of this pre-/post-test show that students have learned more about perfectionism from this programme, this means that the intended learning outcome

- of the programme has been reached. Base on this successful experience, the Academy should continue to offer this programme in the future.
2. The Academy could modify various aspects of the programme to further increase programme effectiveness. However, the current pre- / post- test is not designed to examine the reason behind programme effectiveness. Further research is needed to look into this issue.
 3. A 2-month follow up study could be conducted to measure the sustainability of the understanding by participants, e.g. a focus group could be set up. Results of follow-up studies could act as input for further evaluation of programme effectiveness.

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